

GERSHOM SCHOLEM



ON THE MYSTICAL
SHAPE OF THE
GODHEAD

BASIC CONCEPTS
IN THE KABBALAH

On The
MYSTICAL
SHAPE
of the
GODHEAD

Also by Gershom Scholem

The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932–40 (Ed.)

From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth

Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism

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Zohar—The Book of Splendor: Basic Readings from the Kabbalah (Ed.)

Translated from the German by
JOACHIM NEUGROSCHER

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JONATHAN CHIPMAN

S c h o c k e n B o o k s

N E W Y O R K

Gershom Scholem

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Basic Concepts in
the KABBALAH

Foreword by Joseph Dan

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On The
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Foreword by Joseph Dan

Gershom Scholem, when required to define his own scholarly enterprise, usually described himself as a historian of ideas—somewhat more specifically, as a historian of religious ideas, one whose expertise was the history of Jewish mystical ideas. This volume contains six studies, which can unhesitatingly be described as the finest achievement in this field, and among the best examples of systematic studies in the history of ideas in the middle of this century. These studies pertain to some of the most basic and deep-rooted concepts in Jewish religion, such as the *Shekhinah*, the *Tsaddik*, and the anthropomorphic representation of the Godhead; here they are studied and elucidated in an exemplary methodology, accompanied by profound insight into the dynamics of history on the one hand and the multilayered, constantly changing human craving for approach to God on the other.

The first part of this foreword is dedicated to a brief description of the evolution of this book out of Scholem's lectures before the Eranos Society's annual meetings in Ascona, Switzerland, between 1952 and 1961, and the second part, to a discussion of Scholem's methodology.

I

The six studies translated into English in this volume comprise the second group of Scholem's Eranos lectures to be published in book form. The first group, including five such studies, was published in the original German as *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik* in Zurich, in 1960, and in English as *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* in New York, in 1965.¹ The six studies presented in this volume were published as a book in German in 1962²—*Von der Mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit*—and this is its first appearance in English in book form. Most of these eleven studies were first published as articles in the *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, usually a year after Scholem's lecture on the subject, and some of them were published in English separately.³ A Hebrew translation of these two volumes together, made by

Yosef Ben-Shlomo and revised and updated by Scholem himself, was published in Jerusalem in 1976 under the title *Elements of the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*.⁴ It seems that Scholem regarded these eleven studies as one whole, and it is appropriate that all of them are available now, somewhat belatedly, to the English reader.

It is important to understand the place of these studies within the framework of Scholem's complete works, in order to explain both the author's intentions and the structure and characteristics of this book. The studies were written during the most fruitful period of Scholem's scholarly life, between the years 1949 and 1962. It was in this period that he wrote his two major works: his great monograph *Sabbatai Ẓevi: The Mystical Messiah*, which was published in Hebrew, in two volumes, in 1957⁵ and his history of the early Kabbalah, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, published in German, in 1962.⁶ Scholem published in his lifetime about forty volumes,⁷ but only two comprehensive books, the ones on Sabbatai Zevi and on the early Kabbalah mentioned above. All the others are collections of studies and essays, Kabbalistic texts, letters, and an autobiography. The only subjects that he brought to completion are those two, and they express his sense of priorities as well as his preference; both of them were completed while he was working on the studies presented here.

Scholem wrote three summaries of the entire history of the Kabbalah: the first was his article on the subject for the German *Encyclopaedia Judaica* published in the 1930s;⁸ the second was his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, the best-known and most influential of his books,⁹ and the third was the series of articles on Kabbalah and Sabbatianism that he wrote for the *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* and the English *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (essentially the same material in both), which was published in the volume *Kabbalah* in Jerusalem in 1974.

It seems to me that the studies published here reflect in part Scholem's realization that he was not going to write a comprehensive history of Jewish mysticism as a whole. Though he was at the peak of his scholarly powers, his reputation, and his influence, the enormity of the two tasks to which he dedicated most of his efforts and which he felt compelled to complete, may have caused him to doubt whether he could add to them

another major undertaking, namely, writing a detailed history of Jewish mysticism in the same manner as he did concerning the early Kabbalah and the messianic movement of the seventeenth century. He may have regarded the monographic studies collected here as a substitute to such an integrated history. There is a clear analogy to this: after the publication of the monograph on Sabbatai Zevi, Scholem did not hide his intention to continue the work and to publish the history of the Sabbatian movement after the death of Sabbatai Zevi, and indeed he published many detailed studies about that period; he may have planned to continue it up to the beginnings of the modern Hasidic movement and write a book on the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, his life and teachings. In 1974, however, he published in Jerusalem a large volume of his previously published studies of the later Sabbatian movement;¹⁰ it was quite obvious that the publication of that volume indicated his realization that there would be no continuation of the Sabbatai Zevi volumes; the collection of studies became the substitute. In a somewhat similar way, his Eranos lectures may be viewed as his substitute for a detailed, comprehensive history of Jewish mysticism.

In the beginning Scholem may not have realized the relationship, and especially the difference, between the two collections—*On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* and the present one. Yet this difference is important to the understanding of the development of these monographs. The first Eranos lectures, which appear in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, are dedicated to a completely different aim than the present ones.¹¹ They attempted to present some problems concerning Jewish mysticism within the framework of the study of religions in general. As such, they take up general themes, not necessarily intrinsic or central to Jewish mysticism, such as the mythical element in the Kabbalah (the first Eranos lecture), the relationship between mystics and society, and the international interest in the intriguing problem of the creation of a golem. But all the rest of his Eranos lectures after that—the ones collected in this volume, as well as others that were not collected, and some studies that he published at the same time in other journals—were dedicated to the elucidation of the most central and important topics in the Kabbalah, not

only as viewed from without, by scholars and historians, but as viewed from within, by the Kabbalists themselves.

Initially, Scholem made an attempt to conform to the Eranos framework, and thought that only general subjects would interest and be accepted by the international community of scholars that assembled in Switzerland for the annual meetings. He soon changed his mind, and decided to present that group with the subjects that he believed to be important to his area of study and which conformed to his own blueprint of the general outlines of his work. It is evident that by 1950 he had decided to concentrate his efforts along two parallel lines: to definitively present his studies on the early Kabbalah and Sabbatianism, and to prepare brief histories of central subjects in the Kabbalah in the format of the six studies included in this collection. This, in fact, was the way he worked until his death on February 21, 1982, at the age of eighty-five.

Why did Scholem choose the Eranos Society as the forum for the presentation of his series of studies in the history of Jewish mystical ideas? I believe that at least one of the reasons was the ease with which he expressed himself in German. In the post-Holocaust era, formal participation in a purely German forum was unthinkable. The small group of scholars assembled in the Swiss town of Ascona, with its international audience and humanistic attitude, suited him as much as any German-speaking forum could. He made no concessions to the prevailing scholarly atmosphere in those gatherings. Scholem never denied his reservations concerning the psychoanalytic schools (concerning Freud, he used to say, "I have read dozens of better mythological concepts of the soul than his"), and, especially, his views clashed diametrically with the Jungian approach, which was represented strongly among the Eranos participants. Carl Gustav Jung himself participated in some of the meetings. Mircea Eliade was also one of the dominant figures in the group; they were joined by some of the best-known psychologists of the time, as well as by historians of religion, art, and literature. The Jungian analysis of spiritual phenomena conflicted with Scholem's for one cardinal reason: as a historian, he sought to understand the constant change and the variety in human religious experience and expression. The Jungians and their followers postulated the eternal, unchanging character of these phe-

nomena; according to them, religious practices and symbols are universal and essentially unchanging, being the product of archetypical images deeply imbedded in the soul of every human being. They sought to discover and describe unchanging, ahistorical archetypes, whereas Scholem sought the dialectics of a dynamic historical development. In this sense, his studies are exceptional and atypical in the volumes of the *Eranos-Jahrbuch*.

The Eranos Society, which had begun its annual meetings in the early 1930s, therefore presented Scholem with a convenient forum: a gathering of mostly German-speaking intellectuals, many of them leading scholars in their fields, who shared a similar European philosophical and cultural background. It gave him the opportunity to address an international audience; indeed, there can be no doubt that his lectures there helped to make him a leading figure in the international community of scholars in the humanities. The specific characteristics of these gatherings, however, were not completely suitable to Scholem's attitudes and preferences. He must have been aware that some of the participants in these meetings had less than perfect records concerning their stance toward Nazi ideology in the 1930s. At that time, around 1949, there was not yet a "new Europe"; there were only the scarred, tormented remnants of the old, the Europe of Scholem's physical and spiritual roots, and the one to which he wished, to no avail, to return. Every individual in these gatherings carried within him, in one way or another, the wounds of the Nazi upheavals and the Holocaust. American universities at that time had not yet accepted Jewish studies as a legitimate, integral part of the humanities; most of Scholem's lectures across the Atlantic were given in the framework of Jewish institutions and societies. If he wished to address the international community of scholars, there were very few alternatives to Ascona. Yet it may be suggested that the change in the nature of his presentations, the one evident in the transition from *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* to the present collection, may be regarded as his assertion of his speciality, his decision not to conform to the accepted norms of his audience but to present Jewish mysticism on its own terms, with its own intrinsic emphases according to Scholem's non-Jungian historical analysis.

II

It may sound paradoxical, but an essentially Jungian approach and a Kabbalistic approach to the subjects presented by Scholem in this book may converge and present a united front against the historical analysis written by the scholar. This is a struggle that Scholem fought throughout his life, and in which he achieved only partial success. As this is, I believe, the basic conceptual and methodological problem presented in this book, I shall try to describe it briefly.

Taking the example of the *Shekhinah*, the Kabbalistic symbol of the female element within the Godhead, a Jungian or Eliadean writer will unhesitatingly demonstrate that the image of the God-Mother is an ancient, invariable archetype in the human soul; her worship can be found in “primitive” societies, in Indian mythology, in the Christian worship of the Virgin, and in countless other places. He will try to find similarities in detail, in practices, beliefs, and rituals associated with this figure, making the *Shekhinah* just one more manifestation of this eternal human phenomenon, which here assumes a superficial, relatively meaningless, Jewish terminology. The Kabbalist, however, will completely ignore anything relating to non-Jewish sources and insist that everything concerning the *Shekhinah* is essentially Jewish, but also eternally so. The same *Shekhinah* is described, according to the Kabbalist, in the biblical and talmudic sources, as well as in the ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish mystical works. The interpretation of biblical verses and talmudic sayings concerning the *Shekhinah* found in the *Zohar* and other Kabbalistic works is the true, original meaning of the ancient texts; it is unimaginable to him that Moses could be ignorant of something that Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai (the sage to whom the *Zohar* is attributed) or the sixteenth-century Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria knew. The Jungian writer will assume that the *Shekhinah* is an eternal human archetype; the Kabbalist will claim that it is an eternal Jewish one. They will agree, however, that all ancient sources should be interpreted in a way that will uncover in them the image of the *Shekhinah* as it is known in the later Kabbalistic sources.

The historian will begin his investigation in a completely different way. He will analyze the image of the *Shekhinah* in the *Zohar* or in Lurianic

Kabbalah, and then ask, When, and from where, did these ideas emerge? He will study the biblical texts, the intertestamental literature, the Talmud and the midrash, and conclude, as Scholem and other scholars have, that these ancient sources do not contain any reference whatsoever to a feminine figure of a separate divine hypostasis. He will then try to trace the stages in which the Zoharic concept developed, through various utterances in the late medieval midrash, in the works of the Jewish philosophers of the High Middle Ages, and in the early works of medieval Jewish mysticism. Thus, step-by-step, the concept that was absent in ancient Jewish texts, emerges in the Middle Ages; it was certainly nourished on sources and hermeneutic interpretations of sources from antiquity, but the symbol itself is a purely medieval one. Only after this kind of analysis will the historian compare the concept of the *Shekhinah* to parallel phenomena in other religions, and even then his emphasis will be on the differences rather than the similarities. The difference between the historian and the Kabbalist writer (and the Jungian writer as well) is that the historian *does* accept “no” as an answer: some ideas simply do not exist in some texts and periods. The Kabbalist will never accept that; if he tries hard enough, he can find everything in everything. Examples abound in Jewish history; the two most obvious ones are the reinterpretation of the Old Testament to find in hundreds of its verses prophecies concerning the life and teachings of Christ, (an admirable feat of hermeneutics that can convince the most ardent skeptics, if they are not historians), and the reinterpretation of the *Zohar* and other Jewish texts by the adherents of Sabbatai Zevi in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to prove that the Messiah must, as predicted in hundreds of ancient sayings and verses, be converted to Islam.¹² A more specific, Kabbalistic example is the reinterpretation of the *Zohar* in the seventeenth century and later, up to the twentieth, according to the teachings of Lurianic Kabbalah, which emerged in Safed several centuries after the *Zohar*’s composition.

The obviousness of these examples, which differentiate between the historical-philological approach and the archetypical-Kabbalistic one, should not deceive us as to the difficulties involved in achieving and maintaining the methodology of the history of ideas. Scholem himself did

not make this distinction clearly in the first decade of his scholarly work. This is best demonstrated by his lecture, later published as an article, at the historic occasion of the opening of the Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, which was later to serve as one of the first two institutes (the other was Chemistry) of the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The young Scholem (twenty-seven years old at the time), presented his views concerning the authorship and origins of the *Zohar*, and concluded that though medieval authors contributed to the work as we have it, much of the material, ideas and symbols assembled in it originated in antiquity.¹³ In fact, according to Scholem at that time, the Kabbalah was essentially an ancient phenomenon, surfacing in the works of the medieval mystics rather than being their own original creation.

In this Scholem was following the accepted views of scholars of his time, which were most clearly expressed by Moses Gaster, who treated many Jewish medieval works as remnants of known and unknown ancient texts. Gaster rejected the critical approach of the historian Heinrich Graetz and others, who saw Moses de Leon as the author of the *Zohar* in the late thirteenth century, and the Kabbalah, while absorbing and renewing ancient ideas, essentially as a medieval phenomenon. It took Scholem another decade to distinguish between the two aspects of Graetz's critical attitude to the Kabbalah: his enmity toward it, which Scholem completely rejected, and his historical-philological approach, which Scholem not only accepted but developed in a much more profound and systematic manner. His historical conclusions concerning the *Zohar*, presented in chapter 5 of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*,¹⁴ were supplemented by many of his own subsequent studies and by other scholars; the most comprehensive presentation of this problem was made by Isaiah Tishby in his *Mishnat ha-Zohar*.¹⁵ Although this question has been conclusively answered from a scholarly point of view, it is erroneous to think that by this major scholarly achievement, the historical-philological view of the medieval origins of the Kabbalah has been universally accepted, or that Scholem's scholarly approach has prevailed completely. There have always been, as there are now, writers who continue to seek proof for the Kabbalistic claim of the antiquity of the Kabbalah, moti-

vated often by Orthodox concepts (Scholem had been identified with the secular and scientific study of Judaism). Thus, Professor Samuel Belkin attempted to prove that Philo of Alexandria (first century C.E., before the destruction of the Second Temple), knew and used ideas and symbols found in the *Zohar*;¹⁶ Dr. Israel Weinstock tried to prove that the “ancient Kabbalistic secrets” were transmitted by Aharon ben Samuel of Baghdad from the East to Italy in the eighth century, and that Kabbalah can be found in the works of Saadiah Gaon and other early Jewish philosophers;¹⁷ and Professor Moshe Idel tries to prove that Kabbalistic concepts found in medieval texts can be “reconstructed” in talmudic and midrashic literature.¹⁸ It seems that the clash between the Orthodox-Kabbalistic and historical-philological study of the Kabbalah, which has persisted now for a century and a half (and was debated for a time even within Scholem’s mind), is a constant feature of Jewish culture, and should be regarded as a recurring phenomenon in the study of Jewish writings, supported by Orthodox religious concerns on the one hand and Jungian antihistorical drives on the other. The six studies included in this collection are Scholem’s finest rebuttal of these attitudes and a clear presentation of the methodology of the history of ideas that he adopted.

The basic structure of these studies, therefore, is almost constant: a survey of ancient Jewish texts concerning the subject, including a demonstration of the absence of the particular Kabbalistic symbol in them, (although the religious problem that the Kabbalists later confronted is present in one way or another); then comes a description of the first hesitant steps, often found in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, toward the emergence of the Kabbalistic symbol in the Middle Ages. This is followed by a full exposition of the Kabbalistic symbol, based on the thirteenth-century Kabbalah in Spain and especially the *Zohar*; and finally, a survey of later developments, especially in Lurianic Kabbalah and in Hasidism. Every section in these essays represents a difference, a change, a phase in spiritual development that sets it apart from what preceded it and what followed later. Concepts such as good and evil, the *Shekhinah*, the *Tsaddik*, *gilgul*, are marked by this constant change in the works of almost every thinker and every mystic, in every country and every period. Scholem always dem-

onstrates the dynamic unfolding of the full force of an idea or image, as the result of the ceaseless creativity of every individual mystic, every school or group, every generation. In this, the historian and the philologist differs most radically from the Jungian, the Kabbalist, and the Orthodox writer. He affirms the creative power of the individual, his ability to use old materials, sources, quotations, and to combine them into something new and original. I believe that this element is expressed more clearly in this collection than in any other of Scholem's voluminous publications.

Scholem's methodology is best demonstrated by the studies included in this volume. In some cases one can actually discern in his presentation the historian's marvel and joy as he deciphers the dialectical developments of an idea throughout the ages. The development of the idea of *gilgul* or reincarnation (metempsychosis) in the Kabbalah is such an example. The idea is completely absent in ancient Jewish sources, though some of them were ingeniously reinterpreted by medieval Kabbalists to demonstrate the antiquity of the concept. The first Jewish writers in the Middle Ages who mentioned it completely rejected it, while the Kabbalists in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries embraced it with enthusiasm and made it a part, and later, in Lurianic Kabbalah, a cornerstone, of their concept of the human soul and its relationship with the Godhead. The intricacies of its historical development, and the intensely individual contribution of every mystic, combined here to create a picture of a spiritual phenomenon; only the full presentation of the different, individual formulations of it can reveal its historical role in the structure of a great culture.

One of the most vexing problems facing us in the preparation of this volume was that of updating. In the course of reviewing it, I was struck by the enormous amount of research published on almost all the subjects treated in these studies in the last fifteen years. Scholem's notes in this volume, regarding for instance Rabbi Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, Rabbi Joseph of Hamadan, *Sefer ha-Peli'ah*, *Gallei Razaya*, Rabbi Isaac of

Acre, Rabbi Isaac ibn Latif, Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, are out of date even from a strictly bibliographical viewpoint. On many of these and other subjects, doctoral theses have been written and published, plus dozens, if not hundreds, of scholarly articles. The more general subjects, like Hekhaloth mysticism, Ashkenazi Hasidism, the *Zohar*, the Hebrew works of Rabbi Moses de Leon, Sabbatianism, and modern Hasidism, to name just a few, have been treated in new monographs; new texts have been published, and new approaches have been charted. Two or three dozen scholars, unmentioned in this volume, contributed meaningfully to the subjects discussed here. Updating the notes would require at least a five-fold increase in the number and length of the notes, which would change the whole character of the volume.

There are even more fundamental problems. Scholem wrote these studies before the full impact of the renewed study of Gnosticism, following the publication of the *Nag Hammadi Library*, was felt. The last twenty years witnessed an intensive development in the study of ancient Gnosticism, questioning some long-held concepts and presenting new ones. Scholem's frequent reference to Gnostic ideas and studies of the subject would require an extensive revision in an updated edition (which itself would have to be revised at least every decade). Such a revision, again, would radically change the character of these studies.

The text presented in this volume is a revised one, a revision done by Scholem himself prior to the publication of Professor Ben-Shlomo's Hebrew translation in 1976, that is, nearly twenty years after the first publication of these articles in the *Eranos-Jahrbuch*. Scholem's revisions were minimal. Some of them were minor additions or omissions, to emphasize or de-emphasize a point, and others—very few—updated the notes following new scholarly publications. The chapters of this book, therefore, reflect the author's views near the end of his active scholarly life. For this reason, no updating of the notes or the text has been attempted. The volume is presented to the reader as it is—a classic in the field of the history of ideas in general and in the study of Kabbalistic ideas and history in particular. Anyone wishing to follow a particular detail will have to use current scholarly literature; these studies should not be regarded

as a “last word” on a subject, even though in most cases it is Scholem’s last word. They can and should be accepted as a “last word” concerning the infinite dynamism of Jewish spirituality in its historical development, analyzed by a great master in the ceaseless quest for historical truth.

Jerusalem, 1990

I

Shi^cur Komah: THE MYSTICAL SHAPE OF THE GODHEAD

I

The revolution wrought by biblical monotheism in the history of religion is tied to the imageless worship of God. The prohibition “Thou shalt make unto thee no graven image nor any kind of shape” stands at the beginning of a new revelation. It is associated with worship that abhors images and seeks to evoke the Holy in other ways. However, a question arises here whose answer is not at all self-evident: is this God, who may not be worshiped in the image “of anything that is in heaven or on the earth,” Himself without image or form? This question forces itself upon the reader of the Hebrew Bible, as it does upon any human discourse concerning God. Any discussion of God must necessarily use the imagery of the created world, because we have no other. Anthropomorphism—the application of human language to God—is as intrinsic to the living spirit of religion as is the feeling that there exists a Divine that far transcends such discourse. The human mind cannot escape this tension. In-

deed, there is nothing more foolish than attacking and denigrating anthropomorphism—and yet, nothing forces itself more readily upon the sober and reflective consciousness of most theologians. The dialectics are unavoidable: it pertains, not only to the statements that corporealize God Himself, but also (as is often overlooked) to any discussion of the so-called “word of God.” Benno Jacob, an important commentator on the Jewish Bible, formulated the problem aptly: “‘God spoke’ is no less an anthropomorphism than ‘God’s hand.’”¹

Of course, the anthropomorphic form of expression, freely used in the imagery of the Torah and the prophets, in hymns and in prayers, may not go beyond the realm of speech; it must not make the leap from the liturgical to the cultic. The question nevertheless remains: Does God, the source of all shape, Himself have a shape? Or more precisely: Under what conditions does He have a shape? What features of God actually appear in the theophanies?

The realm of these questions is defined by the terminology of the Bible, which uses two different terms to speak of the shape of God. One term is *temunah*; the other is *tselem*. *Temunah* is derived from the Hebrew root *min* (“kind” or “species”). It refers to that which has a shape or is in the process of taking shape. The second commandment uses the term *temunah* when it forbids the making of the shape of any thing in heaven or on earth for cultic purposes: “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them” (Exod. 20:4). And Deuteronomy (4:12), when recalling the revelation on Mount Sinai, says: “And the Lord spoke unto you out of the midst of the fire; ye heard the voice of words, but ye saw no form, only a voice. . . .” It goes on to stress (v. 15): “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves—for ye saw no manner of form on the day that the Lord spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.”

This is the basis for the prohibition against using images in worship. Only the voice of God, and no other shape, reaches across the abyss of transcendence bridged by revelation. Theophany is an act of hearing: the most spiritualized of all sensory perceptions, but a sensory perception

nevertheless! From here, as we shall see, the road leads to regarding divine speech and the Divine Name as the mystical shape of the Deity. The Bible, however, distinguishes between those images seen by the eye and those perceived through hearing the voice. When the voice of God warns Moses (Exod. 33:20), "for man shall not see Me and live," this does not mean to imply that God is intrinsically devoid of shape—quite the contrary! Indeed, in Numbers (12:8), God says of Moses—whom in the above-quoted passage has been prohibited from seeing Him—"with him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of God² doth he behold." These contradictory statements indicate that discussion of the divine form was not meaningless, even if later exegesis attempted to interpret it away.

No less strange, in this respect, is the second term, which the Torah (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:6) uses only in connection with the creation of man and which, in a certain sense, is the key term for all anthropomorphic discussion of God: *tselem* 'Elohim. The Hebrew word *tselem* refers to a three-dimensional image or form. When God says, "Let us make man in our image (*tselem*), after our likeness," and the following verse says "in the *tselem* of God He created him," man, as a physical-plastic phenomenon, is placed in relationship to the primal shape reproduced in him, whatever that shape might be. God must therefore have something like an "image" and "likeness" (*demuth*) of His own. This "image" or "likeness" is not an object of cultic veneration, but is something that defines the essence of man, even in his physicality. This notion of *tselem*, as the likeness of a heavenly although not necessarily corporeal structure, undergoes all the stages of interpretation and reinterpretation required by the desire for an ever-stronger emphasis on divine transcendence and the conception of God as pure spirit.

It is perhaps relevant to cite here two diametrically opposed views concerning the notion of *tselem* 'Elohim in Genesis, by two well-known modern exegetes. Hermann Gunkel writes:

This similitude refers primarily to man's body, although of course the spiritual is not thereby excluded. The idea of man as the εἰχὼν θεοῦ [*imago dei*] can also be found in the Greek and the Roman

tradition, where man is formed in *effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum*—"in the image of the gods, the master of nature" (to quote Ovid)—as well as in the Babylonian tradition. . . . Modern man will probably object to this explanation by claiming that God has no shape at all, as He is a purely spiritual being. But such an incorporeal God-idea demands a power of abstraction that was beyond the reach of ancient Israel, and attained only by Greek philosophy. The Old Testament instead constantly speaks, with great naiveté, about God's form. . . . God is thus conceived as a human being, albeit many times more powerful and more dreadful. . . . Yet we already note another current in Israel during the ancient period: The prophets find it blasphemous to depict God in an image. God is far too enormous and glorious for any possible image to resemble Him (Isa. 40:25), nor dare we depict Him in words (Isa. 6). Already in the most ancient times, no one could behold His countenance. The more sublime the concept of God became under the influence of the prophets of Judaism, the more this awe increased. . . . Hence, that era would probably not have brought forth the idea that man carries the divine form.³

In Benno Jacob's commentary, we find the exact opposite idea:

There is no doubt that, throughout the Bible, so far as its leading minds are speaking, God is a purely spiritual being without body or form. . . . The *strongest* anthropomorphisms are to be found precisely in the words of those orators and prophets who *simultaneously*, and with the most élan, proclaim God's incomparable sublimity and absolute spirituality, such as Isaiah and Job. Thus, one can say that, the more spiritual the concept, the more anthropomorphic the expression, as these figures were concerned, not with philosophical precision, but with speaking about a living God.

It is not surprising that, for Benno Jacob, Gunkel's above-quoted lines are a "monstrosity," refuted by ethnological facts that Gunkel fails to take into account: namely, that "even primitive nations have achieved such an

abstraction (if it is one). . . . Furthermore, this anthropomorphism (i.e., of the "image of God," *tselem 'Elohim*) is found in P [the Priestly Codex, allegedly the latest written source of the Torah], for whom it would have been most repugnant, according to Gunkel's characterization."⁴

One might say that the vehement opposition between these two passages defines the climate in which our discussion still moves. Both authors are to a large extent correct, yet both distort their basic thesis through misleading generalizations. Benno Jacob quite properly felt that anthropomorphism does not exclude the conviction of God's incorporeity, but his simultaneous goal of banning discussion on the form of God is in no wise confirmed by the biblical text. In any event, our own discussion below has nothing to do with what the authors of the biblical books meant by their utterances about God; the question is rather that of how these utterances were subsequently understood and what effect they had. In this respect it is obvious that the trend toward the pure spiritualization of God, as expressed in intertestamental and especially Hellenistic Jewish literature, is not the only one. It contrasts with another trend that adheres with absolute faithfulness to anthropomorphic discourse about God. The Jewish aggadah is the living and most impressive example of this mode of discourse, in which the sense of intimacy with the Divine is still sufficiently powerful for its authors not to flinch from extravagances that they knew were not to be taken literally. The metaphorical character of such utterances, which generally refer to God's activity rather than to His appearance, is in nearly all cases quite transparent, and is often underscored by the very biblical passages quoted by way of support. But we are not concerned here with the aggadic worldview per se. What really concerns us is the following issue: in light of the hostility of rabbinic theology to myths and to imagistic discourse on God, as well as the tendency in Jewish liturgy to limit anthropomorphic depictions of God, why was the problem of Gods' form not eliminated altogether? As against the rejection of mythical images in the exoteric realm, which tolerated these images only as metaphors, there was a renaissance of such images in the esoteric, where they were connected with mystical theological axioms. In other words, the mythical images became mystical symbols.

II

The development of mysticism in Judaism is linked to speculation concerning the first chapter of Ezekiel. Here the prophet describes a vision he had by the waters of the river Chebar during the Babylonian Exile: he saw a vision of the divine chariot, the *Merkavah*, the divine throne built upon it, and the creatures of the upper world, in animal and human form (who later become categories of angels), who carry it. The elaborate and rather obscure description of the details of the *Merkavah* was subsequently taken up by visionaries in the pre-Christian era, and particularly in the first two centuries of the Christian era, who sought to repeat the experience of the vision of the *Merkavah*. Retaining Ezekiel's terminology, while reinterpreting its meaning, his description was transformed by them into a depiction of the royal court of the divine majesty. This vision was revealed to the visionary upon ascent to the highest heaven: originally, perhaps, the third heaven; later, when the number of heavens was increased, to the seventh heaven. In apocalyptic literature, descriptions of the celestial world include descriptions of the world of the divine throne and the *Merkavah*. But these same authors become extremely reticent when they reach the point of speaking about He who appears on the throne itself, the figure of the Godhead or its theophany: "And upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above" (Ezek. 1:26). Isaiah had already seen "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the Temple" (Isa. 6:1), while Ezekiel describes the light surrounding the figure seated on the throne "as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about" (Ezek. 1:28). But for both prophets what is important is not so much the theophany itself as the voice that emerges and strikes the prophet's ear. Needless to say, this vision of the shape of God on the throne, as of the other elements of the *Merkavah* vision, became an object of contemplation and speculation. The ascent of *Merkavah* mystics to heaven or, in a different version, to the heavenly paradise, was considered successful if it not only led the mystic to the divine throne but also brought them a revelation of the image of the Godhead, the "Creator of the Universe" seated on the throne. This

form was that of the divine *Kavod*; rendering this word as “glory,” “splendor,” and the like fails to transmit the true substance of the numinous conception. *Kavod* refers to that aspect of God that is revealed and manifest; the more invisible God becomes for the Jewish consciousness, the more problematical the meaning of this vision of the divine *Kavod*.

We have thus reached the first major topic in our discussion: namely, the manner in which the Jewish Gnostics and *Merkavah* mystics conceived of the mystical form of the Godhead: the *Shi'ur Komah*. This Hebrew term is often translated as “measure of height,” the noun *komah* being construed in its biblical sense as “height” or “stature.” Such a rendering is valid, particularly given the appearance of this word in the Song of Songs (which, as we shall see, is closely connected with these speculations). Nevertheless, *komah* most likely has the precise significance here that it has in Aramaic, where it quite simply means “body.” Indeed, the body of the Creator or Demiurge is also called the “body of the Godhead” (*guf ha-Shekhinah*), and is described in some highly peculiar fragments that have survived.⁵ Some of the oldest texts containing these fragments understood the anthropomorphisms of the *Shi'ur Komah* in terms of descriptions of the “hidden *Kavod*.” One of these fragments, *Hekhaloth Zutarti*, is ascribed, no doubt pseudepigraphically, to Rabbi Akiva, the central figure in second-century talmudic Judaism. Akiva is presented as receiving such visions, saying that God is “virtually like us, but is greater than anything; and this is His glory which is concealed from us.”⁶ Indeed, the notion of God’s concealed glory is virtually identical with the theosophic usage found in the oldest known traditions of *Merkavah* mysticism, which speak of the vision or contemplation of God’s glory as the deepest level of religious life. Thus, it is rhapsodically promised that, “Whoever knows this measure of our Creator and the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, is promised that he is a son of the World to Come.” Considering the provocative extravagance of this anthropomorphous description, this promise, uttered here by Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, is extremely paradoxical. Nor should we forget that these men were not only the two most important rabbinic authorities of the first half of the second century, but were also viewed by the tradition of *Merkavah* mysticism as the true heroes of Jewish gnosis. The question emerges: Are we

dealing here with attempts of later heretical, sectarian groups to give themselves an Orthodox Jewish appearance? Or are these esoteric traditions authentic ones, taken from the center of rabbinic Judaism in the process of its own crystallization?

These questions occupied medieval Jewish writers passionately, no less than they do modern authors. The bizarre fragments that attempted to describe and measure the limbs of God's body are, as we have said, provocative in their solemnly arrogant boldness: they were bound either to arouse indignation or to be venerated as repositories of a mystical symbolism that was no longer intelligible.

The surviving fragments of the *Merkavah* literature, which are largely incomprehensible and textually corrupt, are quite clearly related to the Song of Songs. Phrases from this biblical book, particularly the portrayal of the beloved (5:10–16), appear repeatedly in various passages:

My beloved is white and ruddy,
Pre-eminent above ten thousand.
His head is as the most fine gold,
His locks are curled,
And black as a raven.
His eyes are like doves
Beside the water-brooks;
Washed with milk.
And fitly set.
His cheeks are a bed of spices.
As banks of sweet herbs;
His lips are as lilies,
Dropping with flowing myrrh.
His hands are as rods of gold
Set with beryl;
His body is as polished ivory
Overlaid with sapphires.
His legs are as pillars of marble.
Set upon sockets of fine gold;
.....

This is my beloved, and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

During the first and second centuries, when the Song of Songs began to be interpreted as portraying the relationship between God and Israel, tremendous weight was given to the descriptions of the beloved, who was seen as none other than God Himself, as revealed in the Exodus, in the splitting of the Red Sea, and in the wanderings in the desert. The *Shi'ur Komah* fragments followed these bodily descriptions and even surpassed them. Enormous measurements are given for the size of the Creator and for the length of each limb. As if this were not enough, unintelligible combinations of letters are given to indicate the secret name of each part. This technique is most probably linked to the schematic drawings of human beings found on Greek amulets and magical papyri of the same period, covered with secret names. These names, composed of Greek letters, obviously belong to the same cultural sphere as the secret names in the *Shi'ur Komah*. As even its oldest extant manuscripts do not date back beyond the eleventh century, and as the copyists of such enigmatic fragments no doubt corrupted any number of passages, there seems no hope of finding the key to this secret. Semitic- and Greek-sounding elements are tangled together, so that the Greek seems more like an imitation of the sound of Greek words than authentic Greek—just as one might expect from, say, glossolalia. Indeed, perhaps these names emerged from such ecstatic speaking in tongues. Thus, any translation of these passages is virtually doomed. The tremendous dimensions make any contemplation illusory; the original goal was presumably a certain numerical harmony among the various measurements, rather than a visual image of the individual numbers.

The key Biblical verse for this tradition was Psalm 147:5: *Gadol 'adonenu ve-rav koah*—"Great is our Lord and mighty in strength." On the basis of the numerological computation (*gematria*) of the phrase *ve-rav koah*, this line was interpreted as, "the size of our Lord is 236." The key figure in the measurements of the body of the Creator, which appears repeatedly, is 236,000,000 parasangs. But this does not tell us much, for "the measure of a parasang of God is three leagues, and a league has ten

thousand cubits, and a cubit three spans, and a span fills the entire world, as it is written, 'who measures the sky with His span' (Isa. 40:12)."⁷

Another fragment reads:

Rabbi Ishmael said: Metatron, the great prince of the testimony, said to me: I bear witness about YHWH, the God of Israel, the living and permanent God, our Lord and Master. From the place of the seat of His glory [that is, the throne] upward there are 118 myriads, and from the place of the seat of His glory downward there are 118 myriads. His height is 236 myriad thousand leagues. From His right arm to His left arm there are 77 myriads. From the right eyeball to the left eyeball there are 30 myriads. His cranium is three and one third myriads. The crowns on His head are sixty myriads, corresponding to the sixty myriads of the heads of Israel.⁸

This last sentence refers to an aggadic conception (as we find repeatedly in these fragments): the image of Sandalphon, the angel appointed over the prayers of Israel, who is a 500-years-walk tall. Thus, every individual in Israel who calls upon God in prayer places a crown on His head, for prayer is an act of crowning God and recognizing Him as king.⁹

These texts exude a sense of the world beyond; a numinous feeling emanates even from these enormous, seemingly blasphemous numbers and from the monstrous series of names. God's majesty and holiness, the form of the celestial king and Creator, assume physical shape in these numerical proportions. What moved these mystics was not the spirituality of His being, but the majesty of His theophany. Rabbi Ishmael reexperienced Isaiah's vision: "I saw the king of the kings of all kings sitting on a high and towering throne, and all the hosts of heaven stood before Him, at His left and at His right."¹⁰ But it is not words of prophecy that reach the initiate here; instead, the highest of all archons shows him the dimensions of the shape appearing in this vision, and of all its individual physical parts, from the soles of His feet to His beard and brow. In reality, though, all measurements fail, and the strident anthropomorphism is suddenly and paradoxically transformed into its opposite: the spiritual.

Suddenly, in the middle of a description in one of these fragments, we read:

The appearance of the face is like that of the cheekbones, and the appearance of both is like the shape of the spirit and the form of the soul, and no creature is able to recognize it. His body is like chrysolite, his brilliance breaks tremendously out of the darkness, clouds and mist surround him, all the archeons and seraphim vanish before him like a drained pitcher. That is why we have no measurement, and only names are revealed to us.¹¹

Indeed, this ancient author is very chary with numbers, but all the more generous in listing the secret names of these parts in the “language of purity”¹²—that is, an esoteric language of the pure names.

However, the “language of the pure name,” in which the mystical form of the Deity in its concealed glory is revealed to the initiate, allows us to recognize a connection between this aspect of Jewish *Merkavah* speculation found in the *Shi'ur Komah* and one of the most puzzling forms of second-century gnosis. The Gnostic teachings of Marcus, a disciple of Valentinus, had always been distasteful to scholars of Gnosticism because of the affinity between his teachings and the linguistic mysticism and letter symbolism of the Kabbalah.¹³ Indeed, the point of departure for his teaching is a mingling of linguistic mysticism and *Shi'ur Komah* notions. Despite the Christian interpretation of these ideas, the mixture points unmistakably to their origin in Jewish esoterism—a point first noted by Moses Gaster nearly a century ago.¹⁴ The Greek form in which these speculations are transmitted is merely Marcus's adaptation of Semitic speculations, a point confirmed by the fact that the ritual formulae he employed in his mystical liturgy are indisputably Aramaic. The native soil of his gnosis was not Egypt, but Palestine or Syria, where he must have become acquainted with the oldest forms of *Shi'ur Komah* imagery.

The *Merkavah* mystics receive their revelation while rising to the throne, while Marcus received his when the supreme Tetras “descended to him from invisible and unrecognizable places in the guise of a woman,

since the world would have been unable to endure its male form, and revealed to him its own being and the genesis of the universe.”¹⁵ This genesis came about when the formless God assumed form:

When, in the beginning, the fatherless father, who is neither grasped by the mind nor has a substance and who is neither man nor woman, wanted to express His ineffable being and make His invisible being visible, He opened his mouth and produced a word that resembled Him. In coming to him, it showed him that it was thereby becoming manifest as the shape of the invisible (γΟῦ ἀοράγου μορφή).”

Both Valentinus and Marcus subsequently connect this “word” with the logos and with Christ; but within the context of Marcus’s speculation *per se*, it was originally nothing other than the great name of God, in which the ineffable being of God becomes effable, assuming expression and shape. Marcus goes on to relate the origin of the pronunciation of this name. The first word of the great name consisted of thirty letters, each one of which has its own special being and shape, and does not recognize the shape of the whole, of which it is only one letter:

With the sound that it itself produces, it believes that it can name the universe by its name, for each of the sounds regards its own sound as the totality, even though it is only a part of the whole. And it will not stop sounding until it has come to the last sign of the last letter. . . . The sounds, however, form the aeon, which is without form or beginning, and they are the shapes that the Lord called angels and that continuously behold the face of the father.

Thus, each individual sign of the name is infinitely powerful, and the letters of the full name of the primal father are infinitely profound. “That is why the primal father, who knows His own ineffability, gave the letters (which he also calls aeons) the ability to sound their own pronunciation, as each individual [letter] was incapable of pronouncing the totality.”

After thus revealing the secret of the supreme name, broken down

into its elements, Marcus receives the revelation of Truth itself from his female guide. "For I brought [Truth] down from her supernal dwelling, that you might see her nude and come to know her beauty, but also to hear her speak and to admire her understanding." There follows a list of the parts of this mystical form, from head to foot, and of their secret names, each of which are nothing but combinations of the first and last letter of the alphabet, the second and penultimate, and so on in this order [the system known in Hebrew as *'atbash*]. Thus, for Marcus, the alphabet as a whole constitutes the mystical shape of Truth, which he—quite in keeping with the Jewish terminology of the "body of the *Shekhinah*"—calls the "body of truth" (σῶμα τῆς ἀληθείας), and the form of the primeval, which, for him, is the primal human being, the Anthropos. "Here is the source of every word, the origin of every voice, the utterance of all that is unutterable, and the mouth of dumb silence."

We find in Marcus that the description of the origins of the mystical form of the primal human being is connected with language mysticism and a doctrine of secret names and letter combinations—much as we have found in the strictly Jewish, or more correctly Jewish-Gnostic, *Shi'ur Komah* fragment. Marcus's theory of language can also aid us in understanding and interpreting the Jewish text. The notion of the letters of God's name as aeons is also a later Kabbalistic teaching. The secret names of the organs are combinations, into which the basic elements of the Primal Man, which is the great Name of God, subdivide. What Marcus refers to as the primal human being corresponds, in *Shi'ur Komah*, to the human form seen by Ezekiel on the throne. The doctrine of the *Shi'ur Komah* contains both a teaching of the name of the Creator—which is a configuration representing God's ungraspable, shapeless existence—and of the sensory shape in which the Creator appeared to Israel as a handsome youth by the Red Sea, and in which He reveals himself to devotees of *Merkavah* mysticism at the end of the journey of the ascending soul. Marcus could therefore have received this teaching concerning the infinite power and depth of the letters from contemporary Jewish tradition, not just from the neo-Pythagorean tradition with which scholars used to link these speculations. In so doing they overlooked precisely those elements lacking in the neo-Pythagorean, but present in the Jewish *Shi'ur*

Komah tradition. In my opinion Marcus was acquainted with both traditions and synthesized them. The *Shi'ur Komah* literature and that variant of this teaching that Marcus adapted to his purposes mutually illuminate one another. Perhaps it should also be noted that the mystical-magical character of the alphabet sequence, in the specific form mentioned above [i.e., *'atbash*], is familiar to the Jewish tradition. In fact, a Greek-Hebrew amulet discovered in Karneol in 1940 contains on the Greek obverse an apostrophe to God, "Thou Heaven-Shaped, Sea-Shaped, Darkness-Shaped, and All-Shaped (*pantomorphos*), the Ineffable before whom myriads of angels prostrate themselves," while on the verso of the amulet the Hebrew alphabet appears, in *'atbash* sequence, as the secret name of God.¹⁶ This sequence is transcribed into Greek on the Greek side of the amulet!

We may therefore assume that the Deity has a mystical form that manifests itself in two different aspects: to the visionary, it manifests itself in the tangible shape of a human being seated on the throne of glory, constituting the supreme primal image in which man was created; aurally, at least in principle, it is manifested as God's name, broken into its component elements, whose structure anticipates that of all being. According to this doctrine, God's shape is conceived of, not as a concept or idea, but as names. This interlocking of tactile and linguistic anthropomorphism, which I consider characteristic of *Shi'ur Komah* doctrine, pervades the extant fragments. Hence, it is not surprising to see a sentence such as: "God sits on a throne of fire, and all around Him, like columns of fire, are the ineffable names."¹⁷ The two realms are not separated, and the names of God, which are the hidden life of the entire Creation, are not only audible, but also visible as letters of fire. Furthermore, according to an aggadah attributed to the Palestinian *Merkavah* mystics of the early third century, "The Torah given by the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moses was given to him in [the form of] white fire inscribed upon black fire—fire mixed with fire, hewn out of fire and given from fire. Of this it is written, 'at His right hand was a fiery law unto them' [Deut. 33:2]."¹⁸ The Torah occupies here the same place as is occupied in Valentinus's and Marcus's gnosis by the already Christianized logos, the primal name of God that constitutes the form of everything.

There thus exists a “body” of the divine *Kavod* which, as we have seen, was a symbol that was revealed to the mystics. Even the most tangible anthropomorphisms bespeak a language of mysteries.¹⁹ Just as there is a mystical body of God in which His image appears, so is there a garment (*haluk*) in which this body is wrapped. This garment is described, not only in the aggadah, but even more in the hymns of the *Merkavah* mystics, some of which are extant from the third century. According to one of these hymns, the heavens were radiated from this mystical “shape”; according to another, “constellations and stars and signs emanate from His garment, in which he wraps Himself and sits upon the throne of glory.” In yet another midrash (which makes use of the technical language found in these hymns), it is related that God opened the seven heavens on Sinai and revealed himself to Israel, “in His beauty, His glory, His shape, His crown, and upon the throne of His glory” (the throne here replaces the garment mentioned in the hymns). It is obvious that this midrash finds nothing wrong with these notions from the sphere of the *Shi'ur Komah* doctrine.²⁰

In the above discussion I have assumed the doctrine of God's form to be extremely ancient, hence one that could have been adopted in Gnostic circles that were joined by early Jewish converts to Christianity. This assumption is strengthened by an extremely interesting passage in the Slavonic Book of Enoch which, unlike the view of André Vaillant (the most recent scholarly editor, whose arguments on this score are quite weak), I cannot ascribe to a Christian author. Rather, I see it as a Jewish apocalypse written in Palestine or Egypt during the first century C.E. The Greek original has been lost, but it evidently used the term *μορφῇ* in the sense of “stature” or “form.” In chapter 13 of this book, Enoch says: “You see the extent of my body (*shi'ur komati*) similar to yours, and I saw the extent of the Lord without measure and without image and without end.” Abraham Kahana's Hebrew translation (in his edition of the Apocrypha) made use of this term, without his being aware of the possibility that the term *shi'ur komah* in fact goes back to this period. The parallel between the contents of the Hebrew *Shi'ur Komah* and the Book of Enoch is striking and thought-provoking.

Similar images of God, as possessing a “form” or bodily shape,

μορφῇ, were certainly known to Jewish-Christian groups and are assumed in the sources of the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, some of which may have come from the Jewish-Christian Ebionite sect. Here too, especially in the seventeenth homily, the “beauty” of the father is emphasized and the parts of his body are described, as in the above-mentioned *Shi‘ur Komah* hymns. The seventeenth homily emphasizes (again, like one of the fragments I quoted earlier) that this body is “incomparably more luminous than the spirit with which we perceive it, and is more radiant than anything else, so that in comparison with this body, the light of the sun must be regarded as darkness.”²¹ All this suggests a connection with the Jewish Gnostic fragments extant in the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the *Shi‘ur Komah*.

This early dating, however, was by no means undisputed. The few nineteenth-century scholars who dealt with these concepts, above all Heinrich Graetz, committed the grave error of dating the *Merkavah* literature far too late; its intimate and multiple connections with Gnostic literature and the syncretistic papyri therefore eluded them. Scholars dated those writings between the seventh and ninth centuries, tracing the anthropomorphisms of the *Shi‘ur Komah* to the influence of an Islamic anthropomorphic school, the *Mushabbiha*, when in fact the exact opposite was the case.²² According to this approach, these Jewish doctrines originated among ignorant groups who were given to grossly sensual ideas, and were quite unknown to the *Merkavah* mystics of the tannaitic period attested to by the Talmud. The progress made in understanding and careful study of these texts has made such views untenable.

Over and above everything said above, there is extremely important, albeit indirect, evidence regarding the age of the *Shi‘ur Komah* tradition connected to the Song of Songs. This evidence appears in a passage by Origen that has never been satisfactorily explicated. In the introduction to his well-known commentary on the Song of Songs—in which the Jewish reading, i.e., in terms of the relationship between God and Israel, is replaced by that between Christ and the Church—Origen writes:

It is said to be the custom of the Jews to forbid anyone who has not attained a mature age to hold this book [i.e., the Song of Songs]

in his hands. Moreover, even though their rabbis and teachers instruct their children in all the books of the Scripture and in their oral traditions,²³ they postpone the following four texts until the very end: the beginning of Genesis, describing the Creation of the World; the beginning of the prophecy of Ezekiel, which relates to the cherubim [that is, the doctrine of the angels and the divine retinue]; the end [of the same book], which describes the future Temple; and this book, the Song of Songs.²⁴

There can be no doubt that this passage refers to the existence of esoteric doctrines connected with the four texts mentioned. We know from the Mishnah that the beginning of Genesis and the first chapter of Ezekiel were considered to be esoteric texts par excellence, and it was therefore prohibited to lecture about them in public. They could be studied privately, but even then only by those who were worthy, mature, and held in esteem by their fellow citizens.²⁵ The reference to the concluding chapters of Ezekiel is presumably related to the association of these chapters with apocalyptic ideas concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. The fact that many details in these chapters openly contradict the Torah's description of the same subject also naturally led to limitations upon their study. Indeed, there was a tendency during the first century to exclude the Book of Ezekiel from the canon of biblical Scriptures because of these very contradictions.²⁶ It may be that the contradictions between these two sources were resolved among certain groups by means of some kind of esoteric teachings, although we have no definite information on this matter.

On the other hand, we know nothing about restrictions on the study of the Song of Songs. In fact, during the second and third centuries, the allegorical reading of this book in terms of the love between God and the Congregation of Israel was a favorite theme in the aggadic lectures of the rabbis. True, according to later testimonies, the Song of Songs was deemed unsuitable for public study because the servant—that is, the Christian Church—had usurped the place of the mistress—that is, the Synagogue. It has been justifiably argued that this would indicate that during the third century the Church allegorically reinterpreted the Song

of Songs in its own interests.²⁷ However, the state of affairs with which Origen was already familiar in the early third century (and we must not forget that he worked in the town of Caesarea in Palestine and was well acquainted with the Jewish tradition)—namely, that of an older Jewish tradition—cannot be explained in terms of this polemic. Jewish scholars prior to Origen's time could not possibly have known about a Christological reading of the Song of Songs that would arouse their qualms about public study of this book for a simple reason: this reading first entered into the Church through Origen's own commentary on it.²⁸ Thus, the Jewish sages of the second or early third century would hardly have limited the study of a book due to a reinterpretation which they could only have known later.

The true basis for Origen's tradition lies in the fact that during the second century the Song of Songs was connected with the esoteric doctrine of *Shi'ur Komah*. Whether it originated from its interpretation or had earlier sources, the Song of Songs functioned as the biblical text upon which this doctrine was based. The *Merkavah* mystics most likely regarded the Song of Songs not only as an historical allegory within the framework of its aggadic interpretation but also as an esoteric text in the strict sense—i.e., as a text containing sublime mysteries, not universally accessible, concerning the manifestation and form of God in terms of the secrets of the *Merkavah*. The most profound of all the chapters of *Merkavah* mysticism is that concerning the shape of the Deity (extant in the *Shi'ur Komah* fragments), which speaks not only about the *Merkavah* per se, but, as we read in *Hekhaloth Zutrat*, "the Great and Mighty, Awesome, Enormous and Strong God, who is removed from the sight of all creatures and hidden from the ministering angels, but was revealed to Rabbi Akiva in the vision of the *Merkavah*, to do his will."²⁹ As Saul Lieberman has cogently shown, it can be demonstrated that the second-century tannaim saw the Song of Songs in terms of a *Merkavah* revelation that occurred at the Red Sea and on Mount Sinai—a point made in a number of midrashim.³⁰ This conclusively proves the age of the *Shi'ur Komah* idea, as I have already suggested on the basis of more general considerations. Origen's passage confirms that in his day, and probably some time before

him, the Jewish teachers in Palestine viewed the Song of Songs as an esoteric text concerning the manifestations and form of the Deity. One might even go further, and join Gaster in conjecturing that the prohibition against public study of the *Merkavah*, a prohibition already operating in the first century, was primarily directed against the *Shi'ur Komah* doctrine.³¹ This dating of the *Shi'ur Komah* is supported by a statement of St. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Tryphon*, chap. 114) that, according to certain Jewish teachings, God has human shape and organs. This statement can be adequately explained by a proper dating of the *Shi'ur Komah* speculation. He presents these teachings not as heretical ideas but as the normative rabbinic teaching of his time. It is hence quite understandable that such notions penetrated, with some variation, even into Ebionite circles.

We may perhaps go even one step further. Mandaean writings frequently contain the designation of God as *Mara de-Rabutha* (the Lord of Greatness), referring to Uthras, the father of all celestial potencies. Scholars have thus far been unable to identify the origin of this term. It now appears that this designation, like so much else in Mandaean Gnosticism, derives from Judaism. The identical wording appears (strangely enough, unnoticed by scholars) in a fragment of an Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, published in 1957; the text comes roughly from the first century B.C.E. There (col. II, line 4), Noah's father, Lamech, speaks to his wife about the "*Mara rabutha*, the king of all worlds." This name is used quite naturally, as one obviously taken for granted in these circles. If the Mandaeans were originally connected with Jewish baptismal sects near the Jordan (as many scholars tend to assume on the basis of their literature), then we are dealing here with the origins of a religious term that was first used in those circles and then moved eastward together with the early Mandaean groups. It is difficult to ascertain the exact image underlying this term. The "Lord of Greatness" may refer to He who possesses the attribute of greatness in an abstract sense, in which case it would hearken back to David's prayer in I Chronicles 29:11. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, etc." Indeed, in the Hebrew texts of *Merkavah* Gnosticism

we find a parallel name for God as “Lord of Strength.”³² However, this may also be a further development along the lines of the *Shi‘ur Komah*, which, as we have seen, concretely depicts the greatness of the “Lord of Greatness.” In this context the key verse that we have already discussed, Psalm 147:5, is particularly suggestive: the “greatness of our Lord” (as the verse was construed here) is alluded to in the words *ve-rav koah*. We thus find both the Hebrew word for “great” (*gadol*) and the Aramaic *rab*, contained in the term *Mara Rabutha*. Perhaps the choice of this verse and its mystical, numerological interpretation as referring to the specific measurement of God’s dimension are based precisely on this title of God.

An important conclusion of our discussion is not merely the fact of the existence of such images as that of a shape of God in ancient Jewish esoterism, but also the fact that we are not dealing here with the ideas of “heretical” groups on the periphery of rabbinic Judaism. On the contrary: The close link between these ideas and *Merkavah* mysticism can leave no doubt that the bearers of these speculations were at the very center of rabbinic Judaism in tannaitic and talmudic times. We must revise forward many of the assumptions of earlier scholars who, finding this notion unacceptable a priori, attempted to relegate the *Shi‘ur Komah* to the fringes of Judaism. The gnosis we are dealing with here is a strictly orthodox Jewish one. The subject of these speculations and visions—*Yotser Bereshith*, the God of Creation—is not some lowly figure such as those found in some heretical sects, similar to the Demiurge of many Gnostic doctrines, which drew a contrast between the true God and the God of Creation. In the view of the *Shi‘ur Komah*, the Creator God is identical with the authentic God of monotheism, in His mystical form; there is no possibility here of dualism. Given the antiquity of these ideas, which we have tentatively traced back to the first century, we may ask whether this orthodox *Shi‘ur Komah* gnosis did not precede the dualistic conception of later Gnosticism, which emerged during the early second century. If so, the entire line of Gnostic development from monotheism to dualism must be understood in an entirely different way from that which scholars have thus far suggested. We likewise cannot ignore the possibility that the pronounced usage of the term *Yotser Bereshith* (De-

miurge) in those fragments (the oldest of which probably go back to the second or third century) might have been introduced in order to indicate the monotheistic alternative to the position of these sectarians—in other words, with a polemical aim against certain Gnostic groups in Judaism who had been exposed to the influence of dualistic ideas, which they tried to apply in heretical, Gnostic interpretations of the Bible.

In any event, these or similar traditions were preserved in Palestinian Judaism and its aggadah. As late as the sixth century, the most important liturgical poet of Palestinian Jewry, Eleazar ha-Kallir, used the terms *Shi'ur Komah* and *Yotser Bereshith* as perfectly acceptable, rather than heretical, concepts.³³ In the ninth century, when the Karaites began their vehement attacks upon the talmudic aggadah and its anthropomorphisms, the burden of their polemic was aimed against the *Shi'ur Komah* fragments, which both enjoyed ancient authority and were already reputed to be completely unintelligible.³⁴ However, the spokesmen of rabbinic Judaism in the Babylonian academies initially adhered to their tradition, and were unwilling to abandon even such extravagant lucubrations of the aggadic spirit as the *Shi'ur Komah*. However, there were great figures who were not prepared to defend this tradition.

Around the year 1000, Jewish scholars in Fez sent an inquiry concerning the *Shi'ur Komah* to Rav Sherira Gaon, head of the Babylonian academy. Among other things, they wrote:

And R. Ishmael said further: "I and R. Akiva are guarantors, that whoever knows the stature of our Creator and the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, is assured a share in the World to Come, provided only that he repeat it in the Mishnah every day." And he began to say, "His stature is thus and such. . . ." And we wish to know whether Rabbi Ishmael said what he said from his teacher, who heard it from his teacher, and so on going back to Moses at Sinai, or whether he said it of his own accord. And if he said it of his own accord, should one not apply the Mishnah (*Hagigah* 2:1): "If a man does not consider the honor of his Creator, it were better had he never been born." May our master explain this to us clearly and fully.

R. Sherira replied:

It is impossible to explain this matter clearly and in full; it can only be done quite generally. Heaven forbid that Rabbi Ishmael should have invented such things out of his own head: how could a man arrive at such utterances of his own accord? Moreover, our Creator is too high and sublime to have organs and measurements in the literal sense, for, "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" (Isa. 49:18). Rather, these are words of wisdom that cannot be conveyed to everyone.

Other versions of this responsum contain even sharper language:

There are hidden therein profound reasons, which are higher than the highest mountains and exceedingly wondrous, and their allusions and secrets and mysteries and hidden things cannot be conveyed to every one.³⁵

In other words, the secrets of the *Shi'ur Komah* themselves allude to profound mysteries. R. Sherira thus has an opinion concerning this issue, but is not prepared to commit it to writing. Indeed, three generations earlier, Saadiah Gaon, under the impact of the Karaite polemic, held a far more reserved position:

There is no agreement among scholars about *Shi'ur Komah*, for it appears neither in the Mishnah nor in the Talmud, and we have no way of determining whether or not it comes from Rabbi Ishmael, or whether someone else composed it under his name. For there are many books which use the name of people who did not write them, but were composed by others who made use of the name of one of the great sages in order to attain prominence for their books.³⁶

Maimonides expressed himself in more extreme fashion. During his youth, he still considered *Shi'ur Komah* as a source deserving of interpretation, but he subsequently changed his mind, and could only view these

texts with horror. When asked whether it was a Karaite work or whether it contained “mysteries of our Sages, of blessed memory, concealing profound matters of physics or metaphysics, as Rabbenu Hai stated,” Maimonides replied:

I never thought that this came from the Sages. Heaven forbid our assuming that this kind of thing derives from their hands! Rather, it is undoubtably no more than the work of a Byzantine preacher. All in all, it would be a highly meritorious deed to snuff out this book and to destroy all memory of it.³⁷

These words indicate the embarrassment felt by Jewish rationalists upon being confronted with a text of this type. Some, of course, attempted to salvage it by means of philosophical, allegorical interpretation—as, for instance, Moses of Narbonne (d. 1362),³⁸ or R. Simeon ben Tsemah Duran (14th c.). The latter explicitly challenges a certain opinion that seems to have been widespread during the Middle Ages, even by several Kabbalists: namely, that the measurements of the *Shi'ur Komah* refer to the highest archons among the angels or to angelic beings. Rather, according to Duran, “the aim of this book is to maintain that everything in existence is God’s Glory, and that their measurements [i.e., that of the organs] is so and so much; or else they referred to the dimensions of the *Kavod* as it appeared to the prophets.”³⁹ According to Duran, *Shi'ur Komah* may be interpreted in a visionary manner (which is not far from the literal truth) or in a pantheistic interpretation which asserts that reality itself as a whole is the mystical shape of the deity. A far-reaching thesis is thus concealed here in mythical images.⁴⁰ In any event, the *Shi'ur Komah* was not an object of reverent study for these medieval Jewish groups; rather, as I have said, it was an embarrassment.

III

In the world of Kabbalah that developed in Western Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, nourished by ancient traditions of Jewish gnosis and the impulses of new mystical inspiration, the atmosphere

was altogether different. Medieval theology had already forgotten the original significance of the *Shi'ur Komah* vision, and was hard set on abolishing any view that attributed to God any human attributes whatever. These philosophers sought to push the biblical concept of monotheism to its utmost extreme, and even outdid the Bible itself in removing any vestiges therein of mythical or anthropomorphic parlance. It is no coincidence that Maimonides began his philosophical magnum opus, *Guide for the Perplexed*, by turning the key word *Yselem* on its head—although, in his opinion, of course, right side up.

In the newly evolving Kabbalah, by contrast, we find the opposite tendency. Here, too, the spiritualization of the idea of God is an accepted fact, but in the reflections that took the place of the *Merkavah* visions, the ancient images reemerged, albeit now with a symbolic character. Unlike the philosophers, the Kabbalists were not ashamed of these images; on the contrary, they saw in them the repositories of divine mysteries. *Shi'ur Komah* became the watchword of a new attitude, which was no longer interested in the details of the ancient fragments—neither those of the measurements and numbers, nor of the enigmatic names, all of which were consigned to obscurity. In their place the Kabbalists returned, in their own way and with their own emphases, to the fundamental idea of a mystical form of the Godhead. The underlying principle might be formulated as follows: *'Ein-Sof*, the Infinite—that is, the concealed Godhead—dwells unknowable in the depth of its own being, without form or shape. It is beyond all cognitive statements, and can only be described through negation—indeed, as the negation of all negations. No images can depict it, nor can it be named by any name. By contrast, the Active Divinity has a mystical shape which can be conveyed by images and names. To be sure, it is no longer a potential object of vision, as in *Merkavah* mysticism; the stature and value of such visions become greatly diminished. Prophetic visions are mediated by infinite levels of theophany originating in deeper regions, which are below the sphere with which the Kabbalists are dealing. However, the Godhead also manifests itself in symbols: in the symbol of the organically growing shape of the tree, in the symbol of the human form, and in symbols of the names of God.

Both tendencies, which we have already encountered in the ancient *Shi'ur Komah* texts and in Marcean Gnosticism, emerge with renewed strength from the Kabbalistic sense of the world, albeit in altered form. The Kabbalists found it an honor, rather than an embarrassment, to speak about the *Shi'ur Komah*. Often enough, they paraded their own *theologia mystica* as the doctrine of the *Shi'ur Komah*, in proud defiance and mocking scorn of the stutterings of the apologists. It is no coincidence that one of the boldest and deepest writings of the later Kabbalah, *Shi'ur Komah* of R. Moses Cordovero of Safed (the most profound speculative mystic of the Kabbalah), bore the same title as that ancient work.

In His active manifestations, the Godhead appears as the dynamic unity of the *Sefiroth*, portrayed as the “tree of the *Sefiroth*,” or the mystical human form (*’Adam Kadmon*), who is none other than the concealed shape of the Godhead itself. Let me briefly recapitulate what the Kabbalists mean by *Sefiroth*. These were originally the ten primal numbers in which all reality is rooted—an idea expounded in a Hebrew text roughly contemporary with the ancient *Shi'ur Komah* and heavily influenced by Pythagoreanism: *Sefer Yetsirah* (The Book of Creation). However, the medieval Kabbalists changed its meaning when they adopted the term *Sefiroth*. For them the *Sefiroth* are the potencies constituting the active Godhead, and through which (to use Kabbalistic language) it acquires its “face.” *’Anpin Penima’in*, the hidden face of God, is the aspect of the divine life turned toward us which, despite its concealment, seeks to take on shape. The divine life is expressed in ten steps or levels, which both conceal and reveal Him. It flows out and animates Creation; but at the same time it remains deep inside. The secret rhythm of its movement and pulse beat is the law of motion of all Creation. As the divine life reveals itself—that is, becomes manifest through its actions on the various levels of divine emanation—it assumes a different shape on each level or, speaking theologically, appears in different attributes. In its totality the individual elements of the life process of God are unfolded yet constitute a unity (the unity of God revealing Himself); together they are the shape of the Godhead.

The plasticity of its being—which radiates in all directions and mani-

feats the infinite goodness of God—is revealed in its manifold functions. Abraham Herrera, in his book *Sha‘ar ha-Shamayim* (ca. 1620), describes the various aspects of the *Sefiroth* as follows:

The *Sefiroth* are emanations from the primal simple unity; making known His good which is without end; mirrors of His truth, which share in his nature and essence, which is above all, and that He is Himself the necessary being; structures of his wisdom and representations of His will and desire; receptacles of His strength and instruments of His activity; treasuries of His bliss and distributors of His grace and goodness; judges of His kingdom, bringing His judgment to light; and simultaneously the designations, attributes, and names of He who is the highest of all and who encompasses all. These ten names are inextinguishable: ten attributes of His sublime glory and greatness; ten fingers of His mighty hands, five of His right and five of His left; ten lights by which He radiates Himself; ten garments of glory, in which He is garbed; ten visions, in which He is seen; ten forms, in which He has formed everything; ten sanctuaries, in which He is exalted; ten degrees of prophecy, in which He manifests Himself; ten lecterns, from which He teaches; ten thrones, from which He judges the nations; ten divisions of paradise or canopies for those who are deserving of it; ten steps on which He descends, and ten on which one ascends to Him; ten beauteous fields, producing all influx and blessing; ten boundaries, which all yearn for but only the righteous attain; ten lights, which illuminate all intelligences; ten kinds of fire, which consume all desires; ten kinds of glory, which rejoice all rational souls and intellects; ten words, by which the world was created; ten spirits, by which the world is moved and kept alive; ten commandments; ten numbers, dimensions, and weights, by which all is counted, weighed, and measured; ten touchstones, by which the perfection of all things is tested, by that which are drawn near and are repelled by them. And these are the ten utterances containing All; the *genera* in whose bosom everything is contained and from whose bosom everything emerges; the providence which extends from one extreme to the other, and by the awesomeness of whose providence

all is prepared for their good and their benefit. . . . The supreme unities, to whom all the initial multiplicities return, by its intermediacy, to the simple unity; and above all the simple unities is the Infinite, blessed be He.⁴¹

Of course, even this turning toward created beings contains the ineffable that accompanies every expression, enters into it and withdraws from it. The awareness of this dual quality, this dialectic of manifestation within shape, is characteristic of the Kabbalist's knowledge of divine matters—a knowledge that was experienced in many ways. For example, the *Tikkunei Zohar* points out that God dwells both in the *Sefiroth* and between them:

You are within all and outside of all, and to every side, and above all and beneath all. . . . And You are in every *Sefirah*, in its length and breadth and above it and below it, and between each and every *Sefirah* and in the thickness of the every *Sefirah*.⁴²

The most precise formulation of this concept is in the writings of R. Moses Cordovero:

The Infinite, the King, King of Kings, who rules all: for His essence penetrates and descends via the *Sefiroth* and between the *Sefiroth*, and between the *Merkavah* and within the *Merkavah*, and within the angels and between the angels, and within the celestial spheres and between the celestial spheres, and within the elements and between the lowly elements, and within the land and between the land and its offspring, down to the final point of the abyss—the whole world is full of His glory.⁴³

In other words, the formless substance of the 'Ein-Sof is immediately present, in its full reality, in all stages of the process of emanation and creation, and in every imaginable shape. In this sense one may say that there is no thoroughly shaped image that can completely detach itself from the depths of the formless: this insight is crucial for the metaphysics

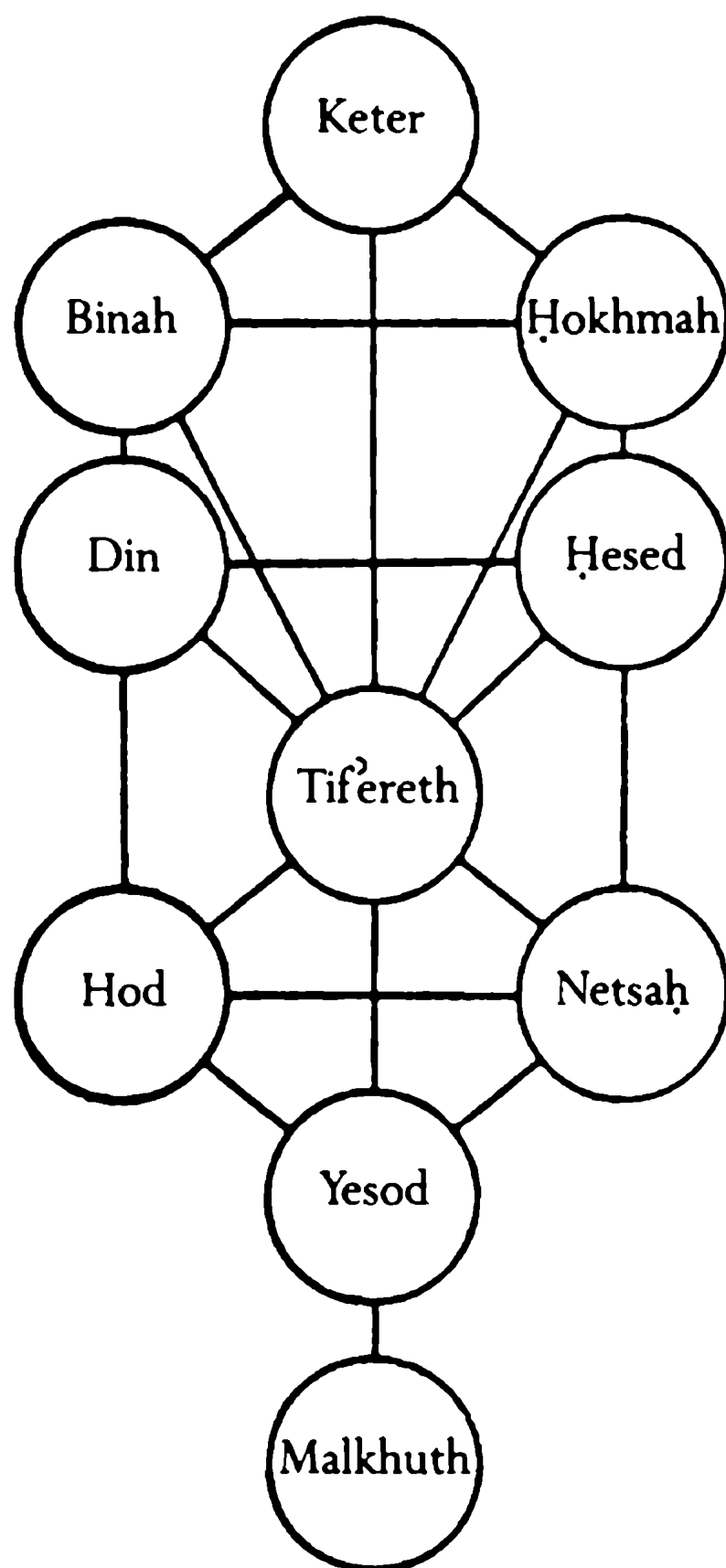
of the Kabbalah. The truer the form, the more powerful the life of the formless within it. To delve into the abyss of formlessness is no less absurd an undertaking for the Kabbalists than to ascend to the form itself; the mystical nihilism that destroys any shape dwells hand in hand with the prudent moderation struggling to comprehend the shape. One might say that both tendencies are peering out of the same shell. It is precisely in the doctrine of the *Sefiroth*, with its emphasis on the mystical shape which lies at the basis of every other shape, that the Kabbalist becomes aware of this danger, and tries to overcome it. The Divine is not only the shapeless abyss into which everything sinks, although it is that abyss too. In its turning toward the outside, it contains the guarantee of the existence of form—precarious and elusive by nature, but no less powerful for that. This comment is perhaps not superfluous in terms of the thought processes we are dealing with here.

But let us return to our point of departure: God's potencies grow into Creation like a tree, nourished by the waters of divine wisdom.⁴⁴ The Sefirotic tree, of which the Kabbalists spoke in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, preserves the image of the organic shape in which each thing is in its proper place, and where it partakes of the flow directed toward it from the union of the totality. The Sefirotic tree, in which God has implanted His strength ("the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted," to quote one widely used exegesis), is also the Tree of the World and, in a certain sense, the true Tree of Life. Its root is located in the highest *Sefiroth*; its trunk embraces the central and thereby conciliating forces; while the branches or limbs which grow out of it at various points encompass the contradictory forces of divine activity in *Hesed* and *Din*. All of these taken together constitute the primary form in which the divine image appears in the Kabbalah. The tree grows upside down—an image familiar to us from many myths. The three uppermost *Sefiroth*—*Keter* (crown) or, in the *Zohar*, *Ratson* (will); *Hokhmah* (wisdom); and *Binah* (insight or discernment)—are the basic ground and roots of this tree. It is no coincidence that these determining forces are from the world of the intellect. In the next three *Sefiroth*, we find *Hesed* (grace or love), *Din* or *Gevurah* (severity or judgment), and *Rahamim* or *Tifereth* (mercy, also known as splendor or beauty), in which the extremes are united and conciliated. Again, it is no

coincidence that this sphere is defined by moral forces. The last triad consists of *Neisah* (endurance), *Hod* (splendor or majesty), and *Yesod* (the foundation) or *Tsaddik* (the Righteous One). This completes the picture of the creative forces, enabling them to operate together through the living force of God, by which everything finds its place and is maintained. As the living force par excellence, it is likewise the force of procreation, represented through symbols of male sexuality. All these active factors are in turn united in the tenth *Sefirah*, *Malkhuth* or *Shekhinah*, God's royal rule, into which they flow as into the ocean. The living forces of the Godhead pass into Creation through the medium of the last *Sefirah*, represented in symbols of receptivity and femaleness.⁴⁵ We thus arrive at a fixed canonic image of the Sefirotic tree, represented as shown on page 44.

While the image of the Sefirotic tree is represented in other structures, this one is the most widespread. The *Sefiroth* are thus not a series of ten emanations of aeons emerging from one another; on the contrary, they constitute a well-structured form, in which every part or limb operates upon every other, and not just the higher ones on the lower. The *Sefiroth* are connected with one another by means of secret "channels," *tsinoroth*, whereby each radiates into the other and in which the other is in turn reflected. The specific nature of each potency is deeply rooted in itself, but every potency likewise contains some aspects of all the others. Moreover, each one repeats in itself the structure of the whole, and so on ad infinitum—a point elaborated by the later Kabbalah. It is through this process of infinite reflection that the whole is reflected in every member and thus, as Moses Cordovero explained, becomes a whole.⁴⁶

However, the *Sefiroth* do not appear only in the shape of the tree. They also appear in the form of Primal Man (*ʿAdam Kadmon*), which corresponds to that of earthly man. The *Sefiroth* are the "holy forms," first mentioned in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, in which these two symbolic representations appear one after another. In S §112 (M §166) the date palm is cited as a symbol of the procreative power of the Godhead, exactly as in the Mandaean writings. The "seventy palms" found by the Israelites at Elim (Exod. 15:27) during their wandering in the desert, indicate that "God has seventy shapes," and every palm tree corresponds to one of these



primal shapes. The Hebrew term *komah*, used here for “shape,” is the same as that used in *Shi'ur Komah*. However, in S §§114 and 116 (M §§165, 172), the organs of man correspond to the “seven sacred forms of God”:

The Holy One, blessed be He, has seven sacred forms, all of which have their counterpart in man, as said, “In the image of God He made him.” . . . These are: the right and left thighs, the right and left hands, the torso, the phallus and the head.

In a different version, in which the torso and the phallus are not separated, the female is the seventh form that completes them. Above these seven bodily forms, corresponding to the seven lower *Sefiroth*, are the three upper *Sefiroth* symbolizing the spiritual forces: thinking, wisdom, and discernment. These are not conceived as bodily forms, but, at least according to the *Zohar*, are localized in the three chambers of the brain. There are, however, different developments of this symbolism, in which their correspondence to human organs is formulated in far greater detail.⁴⁷ In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the oldest extant Kabbalistic text, these forms of God are explicitly identified with the *tselem* 'Elohim of Genesis 1:27: "In the image of God He created him." *Sefer ha-Bahir* adds: "in all his limbs and in all his parts" (S §55; M §82).

These notions received their most decisive expression in the *Zohar*, which views man as the most perfect shape—"the form that contains all forms" or "the image that contains all images"—through which alone all things exist. The first worlds that were created were destroyed because this true shape had not yet achieved its perfection, so that the balance and harmony in which everything exists through the secret of this shape had not yet been established. The lower, earthly human being and the upper, mystical human being, in which the Godhead is manifested as shape, belong together and are unthinkable without one another in a well-ordered world.

The perfection of the universe resides [or: appears] in this shape of man; it was this shape seen by Ezekiel on the throne, and of this that Daniel spoke when he said, "And, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of days, and he was brought near before Him" (Dan. 7:13).⁴⁸

Thus, the *Zohar* returns to the same Biblical motifs found in the *Shi'ur Komah*. In the boldest parts of the *Zohar*, the 'Idra Rabba, the 'Idra Zutta, the Greater and the Lesser Assembly, (which are a sort of Kabbalistic *turba philosophorum*), and the *Sifra de-Tseni'utha*, "The Book of Conceal-

ment”—in which these ideas are summarized in solemn cadences—we find a version of the *Shi'ur Komah* reconceived in the spirit of the Kabbalah. This new version is in no way inferior to the ancient fragments, either in boldness or, if one may phrase it thus, Gnostic presumptuousness. However, in contrast with the *Shi'ur Komah*, it does not conceal its metaphysical background. Every organ of 'Adam Kadmon, nay, every last hair on his head, is a world unto itself; every detail alludes to configurations of the *Sefiroth* that unfold and reveal the infinite wealth contained in them. The details of the description reveal some acquaintance with medieval anatomy, and the author revels in the anthropomorphic paradoxes that supply the key words and mottos for the symbolic presentation of his metaphysics. Daniel's vision of "the Ancient of days" (Dan. 7:9), 'Atik Yomin, whose head is as white as snow and whose hair is like pure wool, provides the author with a term uniting the graphic image of a man of hoary old age with the notion of God's sheer remoteness and transcendence ('atik means both "old" and "removed"). But it is not by chance that the notion of 'Atika Kadisha, the "Holy Ancient One," reverberates with both these meanings, pointing also to the God who moves back from transcendence to shape. The 'Idroth hardly speak about the 'Ein-Sof, the infinite and formless God; in any event, they do not use this term. 'Atika Kadisha, the Holy Ancient One, which serves here as the supreme symbol, does not refer to 'Ein-Sof as such, but to 'Ein-Sof as it appears or, rather, is concealed in the highest *Sefiroth*. The concrete, visual symbol of the Holy Ancient One thus contains the dialectics of this transition from formlessness to form.

It seems obvious that the writer of these pieces was aware of the presumptuousness of his efforts. The hero of the mystical romance of the *Zohar* is the *mishnah* teacher Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai. He begins his discourse in the 'Idra Rabba with a warning against the very anthropomorphism in which he is about to indulge. His warning is framed in the words of Deuteronomy: "Cursed be the man that maketh a graven or molten image" (Deut. 27:15). The words that follow concerning the "secrets of the Ancient of Days" are termed mysteries, and the speaker harbors no doubts about their merit: "I do not tell the heavens to listen,

nor the earth to hear, for we ourselves support the existence of the worlds." He begins his interpretation of the *Shi'ur Komah* as follows:

Before the Ancient of Ancients, the Hidden of the Hidden, prepared the shapes of the king and the crown of crowns, there was neither beginning nor end. He sketched and measured and spread out a curtain, in which he drew and called forth the primal kings. But these shapes did not endure, as it is written, "These are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel" (Gen. 36:31): a primal king over a primal Israel. And all those who were inscribed [in the curtain] were given names, but they did not endure, for He left them and concealed them. After a time, however, he entered that curtain and gave Himself shape. And we learn that, when He made up His mind to create the Torah, which had been hidden for two thousand years [prior to the creation of the world] and He took it out, the Torah instantly spoke before Him: "He who wishes to shape and to have effect, must first shape his own shapes [that is: shape himself]." And we have learned in the *Sifra de-Tseni'utha*: "The Ancient of Ancients, the Concealed of the Concealed, Mystery of Mysteries, took on a shape and it was given. He exists and yet does not exist; there is no one who can recognize him, for he is the Ancient of Ancients, the Elder of Elders, but in his shapes he becomes recognizable without being recognizable."⁴⁹

Sifra de-Tseni'utha uses the symbol of a scale to explain why the original shapes did not endure:

For so long as the scale did not exist, there was no seeing from countenance to countenance, and the primal kings perished,⁵⁰ and their species had no existence, and the earth vanished. . . . This scale hangs in a place that is not; on it are weighed those who do not exist; the scale stands on itself; it is not attached [to anything] and it is not visible. Those who were not, who are and who will be, have ascended and do ascend upon it.⁵¹

According to some, this scale is identified with the *Sefirah* of *Hokhmah*, divine wisdom, the principle of divine harmony permeating all worlds and all being. According to others, it represents the balance between the male and the female principle. In any event, the scale represents the principle of structure and shape. It is worth noting that the same symbol is used at the beginning of Dionysius Areopagita's book on the holy names (I, §3), which is a fundamental work of fifth-century Christian mysticism. This author also speaks of "that primeval divine scale which regulates all of the holy orders, and reaches even unto the celestial choruses of the angels."

The problem of the divine form is also posed in a precise formulation at the beginning of the *ʿIdra Zutta* (*Zohar*, III, 228a):

The Holy Ancient One, the Most Concealed of all the Concealed, who is separated from everything and yet not separated, for everything is connected to Him and He is connected to everything. He is everything; the Ancient of Ancients, the Concealed of the Concealed, who has shape and yet has no shape. He has shape in order to maintain the universe, and yet has no shape because He does not exist. When He assumed shape, He produced nine blazing lights from His shape, and these lights shine out of Him and spread continuously on all sides, like a lamp [or candle] from which light spreads on all sides; but when one approaches these lights in order to know them, there is nothing there but the lamp alone. Thus, the Holy Ancient One: He is a mystical lamp, Concealed of all the Concealed, knowable only through those lights which spread out from Him, reveal, and instantly conceal again. And these lights are called the Holy Name of God, and that is why everything is one.

The image in which the Ancient of Ancients is embodied, meticulously described in the *ʿIdroth* as the shape of the Primal Man, is identical with the name of God. The close interrelationship between the two realms, which we already found in the ancient *Shiʿur Komah*, is emphasized in this work too: that of the seemingly sensory contemplation of the parts of the body, and that of God's name, which breaks down into holy names in the

unfolding of the divine word. The Gnostic thinker Marcus describes in detail how the first word of His name—which, not coincidentally, is the first word of the Greek Bible, ἀρχή (beginning)—is to be analyzed, applying the procedures of linguistic mysticism to the Greek words and letters. In this procedure the names of the Greek letters are written, and their component letters are in turn written out as full names of letters, etc. The Kabbalists employed the same method in their own mysticism of language, in which the Tetragrammaton is split and divided into other divine names. In discussing this the *'Idra Zutta* weaves together the themes of anthropomorphic and linguistic mysticism.

What takes on form in God is that in which He reveals and announces Himself. Yet what would such a revelation be if not the name of God? Thus, the true elements of the divine form are the component elements of His name, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This idea is one that accompanies Kabbalah from its first emergence and throughout its history. One of the earliest classical works of Spanish Kabbalah is entitled *Sefer ha-Temunah* (The Book of the Shape), the shape referred to being that of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which is the symbolic shape of the Godhead. One who is absorbed in contemplation of the Hebrew alphabet fulfills the verse mentioned at the beginning of this book: “And the shape of God does he behold” (Num. 12:8). These words refer to Moses, the receiver of the Torah; he was the great mystical adept, to whom this mystical form was revealed during his immersion in the Torah and its mysteries. *Sefer ha-Temunah* entirely avoids the forms of expression found in the *Shi'ur Komah* literature; it only refers to the configuration of the letters, which may be described as symbols of the various *Sefiroth*. But generally speaking, both views exist side by side; for the Kabbalist, they are merely different *façons de parler*.

The first configuration of ten, presented at the beginning of the *'Idra Zutta*, is that of the lamp and its nine lights: while these form the shape of the divine name, they are still included in the unity of the Holy Ancient One, whose being is both transcendent and nontranscendent, and they are negated therein. It is not clear whether the nine lights correspond to the nine *Sefiroth* that emanate from the first and highest *Sefirah* and with it form a decade, or whether the author of the *Zohar* is speaking

of nine lights that shine within the first *Sefirah* itself and illuminate its various internal aspects, even before the transition to the next *Sefirah*. In this *Sefirah* of divine wisdom a positive factor is added, diminishing the mystical obscurity and ineffability prevailing in the *Zohar*'s remarks about the Holy Ancient One. For our purposes there is no need to decide between these two interpretations.

This highest mystical form of the Godhead is also described in the *Idroth* as the *'Arikh Anpin* (literally, "the forbearing one"; the term was later construed as meaning "the large face"); it is likewise designated the "white head," *resha hivvera*. The skull, cerebral chambers, forehead, eyes, nose, and beard of this face are meticulously described, together with statements of mystical theology. Keeping with the biblical description of the Ancient of Days, he is depicted as an old man, white-haired, harmonious, thoughtful, and sleepless: "His eyes are balanced as one, constantly look about and do not sleep, as is said, 'Behold, the keeper of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers.' " . . . "Therefore, he has no eyebrows, and there are no lids to his eyes" (*Zohar*, III, 289a). The body belonging to the white head is not described, but its existence is assumed. On the other hand, the parts of the head are described in great detail:

This Holy Ancient One is entirely concealed, and the highest Wisdom exists in his skull. Indeed, nothing of this Ancient is revealed except for the head, which is the supreme head of all heads. The highest wisdom, which is a [lower] head concealed therein, and is called the highest brain; the concealed brain, that is calm and prudent and of which no one knows apart from Himself. Three heads are carved out, one inside the other and one above the other. The first head [from below] is the concealed wisdom, which is concealed and not opened, and is the uppermost head for all other wisdoms [i.e., the *Sefiroth* emanating from it]. [The second head] is the supreme head, Holy Ancient One, the Concealed of all Concealed, the supreme head of all heads. [The third head] is a head that is not a head, and no one knows and it cannot be known what is in this head, for it is beyond wisdom or insight [i.e., this third head is the formless *'Ein-Sof* concealed within *'Atika Kadisha*, the Holy An-

cient One] . . . And that is why the Holy Ancient One is called the nothingness, for the nothingness depends on him. And all those hairs and threads emerge from the concealed brain, and they are all smooth and even, and the neck [covered by the hair] is not visible (III, 288a–b).

It is clear from this that the figure of the *'Atika Kadisha* also alludes to the *'Ein-Sof*, which transcends all “heads” and is beyond all shapes.⁵² One can see how problematical this most profound image of the Godhead is specifically as a shape—and to what extent the dialectics I spoke of earlier is operative here—from the fact that the same shape could also be called the nothingness. This image that can be called nothingness is ineffably filled with the rooted in shapelessness.

The problematical figure of *'Arikh 'Anpin*, the first and highest *Sefirah*, becomes clearer when it is manifested in the continuous sequence of the divine manifestations, as the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*. Taken literally, *Ze'ir 'Anpin* refers to God as the “Impatient One”—that is, exhibiting the forces of rigor and justice alongside those of mercy and infinite generosity. This configuration of the *Sefiroth* is the true shape of the Godhead, embracing as it does all the manifestations of His activity. According to the *'Idra Rabbah*, it includes everything from *Hokhmah*, the divine wisdom, down to *Yesod*, the foundation of the world. In another version, that of the *'Idra Zutta*, this configuration embraces the six *Sefiroth* in two trios from *Gedulah* (*Hesed*) to *Yesod*. *Hokhmah* and *Binah* are here conceived as distinct shapes through which the worlds of these two *Sefiroth* are shaped and constructed; in this capacity they are designated as “father” and “mother” of the lower *Sefiroth*. Each *Sefirah* has its own structure, by which it was built as a “shape within the shape.” Each one also has concealed worlds that are permeated with the structural laws of that *Sefirah*. For the *Zohar*, however, *Ze'ir 'Anpin* is essentially God as He is revealed in the unity of his activity. The true name of God, the Tetragrammaton, befits this level of manifestation and expresses its special structure. The factor joining and complementing the *Ze'ir 'Anpin* is its feminine counterpart, the *Shekhinah*, the last shape of the Divine in this system. In reality, however, the concealed shape of which we spoke above, which is on the

frontier of shapelessness, and that of the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, which can be apprehended through mystical meditation, are not two separate forms. Thus, we read in the *'Idra Rabba*:

The epitome of all these things is that the Ancient of Ancients and the *Ze'ir 'Anpin* are all one; everything was, everything is, everything will be in Him. No change takes place in Him, has ever taken place in Him, or will ever take place in Him. He has taken shape in these forms, and thus the shape that comprises all shapes in itself is complete; the shape that comprises all names in itself, the shape in which all other shapes appear; not that it is a shape, but that it has something of the shape. When the crowns and diadems [i.e., the *Sefiroth*] come together, the universal perfection comes about, for the higher ones and lower ones are combined in the shape of man. And because this shape embraces the higher and the lower ones, the Holy Ancient One has formed his forms and those of the *Ze'ir 'Anpin* in this shape. But if you ask: What is the difference between them? [The answer is:] Everything was in one equilibrium, but from here [i.e., the Holy Ancient One] there emanates the forces of Mercy, while from here [the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*] there issues severity [or justice]. And they are distinct [only] from our point of view. (*Zohar*, III, 141a–b)

Israel, it claims, lost the battle against Amalek because the children of Israel made a distinction between the *'Atika Kadisha*, who is called Nothingness, and the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, called YHVH:

They wished to know [i.e., to distinguish] between the Ancient One, the Concealment of all Concealment, who is called *'Ayin* (Nothing), and *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, who is called YHVH. Therefore . . . they asked “Is the Lord [YHVH] among us, or not [Heb.: *'ayin*; literally, “nothing”]?” (Exod. 17:7). If so, why were they punished? Because they differentiated [between those primal shapes] and made a test, as it is written “because they tried the Lord” (ibid.). Israel said: “If it is this one [i.e., *'Atika Kadisha*], then we shall ask

in one fashion; but if it is the other [*Ze'ir 'Anpin*], then we shall ask in another fashion." (*Zohar*, II, 64b)

In a brief passage, parallel to the *'Idroth* (*Zohar*, II, 122b–123a), we find a succinct description of the “countenance of the king”—that is, the *Ze'ir 'Anpin*—in which the anthropomorphic *Shi'ur Komah* symbols are connected to theological motifs:

It is taught in the *Mystery of Mysteries*: The king's head is arranged according to *Hesed* and *Gevurah*. Hairs are suspended from his head, waves upon waves, which are all an extension, and which serve to support the upper and lower worlds: princes of princes, masters of truth, masters of balance, masters of howling, masters of screaming, masters of judgment, masters of mercy, meanings of Torah, and secrets of Torah, cleannesses and uncleannesses—all of them are called “hairs of the king,” that is to say, the extension that proceeds from the holy king, and it all descends from *Atika Kadisha*.

The forehead of the king is the visitation of the wicked. When they are called to account because of their deeds, and when their sins are revealed, then it is called “the forehead of the king,” that is to say, *Gevurah*. It strengthens itself with its judgments, and extends itself to its extremities. And this differs from the forehead of *Atika Kadisha*, which is called *Razon* (“will,” or “pleasure”).

The eyes of the king are the supervision of all, the supervision of the upper and the lower worlds, and all the masters of supervision are called thus. There are [different] colors joined together in the eyes, and all the masters of the supervision of the king are given the names of these colors, each one according to its way; all are called by the names of the colors of the eye. When the supervision of the king appears, the colors are stimulated.

The eyebrows are called “the place,” which assigns supervision to all the colors, the masters of supervision. These eyebrows, in relation to the lower regions, are eyebrows of supervision [that derive] from the river that extends and emerges, and [they are] the place which brings [influence] from that river in order to bathe in the whiteness of *Atika*, in the milk that flows from the mother; for when

Gevurah extends itself, and the eyes shine with a red color, *Atika Kadisha* illumines its own whiteness, and it shines in the mother, and she is filled with milk and suckles everything, and all the eyes bathe in the mother's milk, which flows forth perpetually. This is [the meaning of] Scripture: "Bathing in milk" (Song of Songs 5:12)—in the milk of the mother, which flows forth perpetually, without cease.

The nose of the holy king is the focal point of the countenance.⁵³ When the forces of power extend themselves and are gathered together, they are the nose of the holy king, and these powers depend upon the single *Gevurah* and emerge from there. When the judgments are aroused and come from their borders, they are tempered only by the smoke of the altar, and then it is written: "And the Lord smelled the sweet savor" (Genesis 8:21). The nose of *Atika* is different, since it does not need [the sweet savor], because the nose of *Atika* is called "long-suffering" in every respect;⁵⁴ the light of the concealed wisdom is called his "nose." And this is "praise" as it is written "My praise will I show you" (Isaiah 48:9), and King David was inspired by this: "Praise of David" (Psalm 145:1).

The ears of the king: when the desire is there and the mother gives suck, and the light of *Atika Kadisha* is kindled, then the light of the two brains and the light of the father and mother are aroused—all of these are called "the brains of the king," and they shine together, and when they shine together they are called "the ears of the king," for Israel's prayers are received, and then the movement begins toward good and evil, and by this movement the winged creatures are aroused who receive the sounds in the world, and all of them are called "the ears of the king."⁵⁵

The lips of the king and his palate are then portrayed in a similar fashion.

It is clear that *Shi'ur Komah* imagery is closely interwoven here with the author's mystical theology concerning various foci of divine activity. Each of the "bodily parts" corresponds to a specific realm, which provides the basis for a Kabbalistic thesis concerning the activity of the *Atika Kadisha* and the *Ze'ir Anpin*. This is obviously a later approach, which reinterprets the biblical anthropomorphism and is already influenced by

medieval theology.⁵⁶ The author of the *Zohar*, and the later Kabbalists who followed in his footsteps, adopted this symbolism in an astonishingly daring manner; their goal was to defend the doctrine of a mystical form of the Godhead in order to explain the secret of divine activity. It took courage to employ these daring and, often enough, grotesque images. But they were also inspired by the certainty with which, in the course of comparing the theory of emanation with the mystical linguistic theory of the name of God, they grasped the imagelessness which, as a great modern thinker put it, is the refuge of all images.⁵⁷

Sitra Aḥra:
GOOD AND EVIL IN
THE KABBALAH

I

Any discussion of the concepts of good and evil in the history of human thought confronts an enormous problem. Good and evil are rarely defined in the classical texts of most religions; instead, they are taken for granted as givens. It is therefore not surprising that the philosophers' speculations upon the nature of good and evil often conflicted with those categories that the ancient texts had assumed as self-evident. This applies to the monotheistic religions, whose sacred writings establish—or, to be more precise, presuppose—as good those thoughts and deeds that accord with God's will, and evil as the defiance of His will. In any case, when the Hebrew Bible makes statements about what God loves and what God hates, it clearly operates on such premises. But the Bible also accepts another premise, with a simplicity astonishing to the modern reader who has been spoiled by metaphysical speculations. The Bible presumes that the antitheses of good and evil—which determine his

values and in which man is so ineluctably trapped—both equally originate in God's will and creation. It does not matter whether we understand the Bible's words as polemicizing against the dualistic religious attitude of the Persians or as an original conception. Either way, we are impressed by the unequivocal manner in which evil is accepted within God's creation. "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the Lord, that doeth all these things" (Isa. 45:7).

Evil, however one conceives of it, is thus regarded as an entity deliberately created by God. "The Lord hath made every thing for His own purpose, Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). Evil exists and owes its origin to God's creation and activity. This is the oldest answer to the question of the origin of evil; behind it, virtually at the next turn, lurks the doctrine of predestination. All monotheistic religions have struggled with this question desperately, summoning all the resources of the human intellect. The author of Lamentations cries out rhetorically, "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (3:38). As the question of the nature and origin of evil became more pressing, the wording of this sentence in the original Hebrew came to be construed in the opposite sense: namely, as a declarative statement rather than as a question. The entire problem of good and evil is immanent in such an exegesis.

The Bible, in its unflagging naiveté, knew precisely where it stood with regard to good and evil. This unequivocal attitude was clouded by the intrusion of Greek speculation into the world of monotheistic religions. The question of how evil can emerge from God opened the most bitter and agonizing problems of religious thought. Platonic dualism most likely had a greater share in the severity of this question than the real or imagined influence of Persian thought; regarding this problem, all three major Mediterranean religions stand under the shadow of Plato. The antitheses of light and darkness, good and evil, spirit and matter, take on a completely different meaning in Platonic thought than they do in the ancient texts; biblical faith and philosophy clashed violently here. We may recall the prayer of the "both pious and original" Lady Blanche Balfour, whose words could be the fervent prayer of countless faithful believers over the past two thousand years: "Lord, preserve us from the dangers of meta-

physical hair-splitting and unnecessary brooding on the origin of evil." But the stubborn insistence of systematic thought rides roughshod over the prayers of pious souls. As the history of theology teaches us, the philosophical perspectives from which the theologians of the major religions approached the tension of good and evil were all influenced by the same Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas; in this respect, the differences among them are far smaller than one might think. It is as through the only conceptual apparatus through which this basic problem could be approached was the Platonic, or its Aristotelian variant. For both philosophers, after all, the discussion of evil amounted to the metaphysics of privation, of nonexistence. The respective realities of good and evil are not equivalent, for evil, like matter and darkness, is merely a positive designation for a lack, for something that does not exist. This notion dominated European and Arabic thought for many centuries. To phrase it in Neoplatonic terms, evil is the nonentity at the frontier of being, at the extreme end of the chain of emanation. Unlike the luminous nature of the good, the dark nature of evil does not actually exist; it is presented as existent only by mythical speech, in a kind of metaphorical shorthand. This was one of the principal points in which the conflict between man's "concrete" experience and its "theoretical" explanation literally cries to Heaven; in this respect, it resembles the conflict between the Ptolemaic and Copernican approaches to the movements of the earth and of the sun.

The contributions of Kabbalah to this perennial theme are interesting for the following reasons: The Jewish mystics tried to break away from the tyranny of the Greek conceptual apparatus and, albeit at times awkwardly and without being fully aware of their own boldness, they developed ideas that in crucial ways refused to evade the reality of evil. Their approach reveals both their strength and their weakness. It shows their weakness because it led them from the world of concepts back into the world of symbols, which they were not yet capable of translating back into concepts. It also shows their strength, because they refused to go along with the ostrichlike position of the philosophers who, when confronted with the reality of evil, escaped into the theoretical dialectics of matter and form. Granted, these dialectics were better developed than

the concepts of the Kabbalists, and it is not surprising that the latter, in desperate moments, attempted to utilize them. This is of course no less paradoxical than, for example, Catholic theology resorting to Aristotelian concepts in order to prove the existence of Hell or of eternal damnation. What interest us, however, are the actual concerns of the Kabbalists, who profoundly transformed the biblical world with their interpretations while adhering to its essential elements. They thus rejected the two primal principles of the metaphysical dualism of matter and form, on which Plato and Aristotle ultimately based good and evil, seeking instead to retain the monotheistic principle of God's oneness. These Kabbalistic efforts have been recorded in extremely diverse forms, a few of which I will present here with the aim of progressively clarifying their struggle to understand good and evil in the world. I shall discuss and interpret some far from simple Kabbalistic texts, by which we shall come to know their peculiar and characteristic mode of commentary on the ancient texts, a form in which Kabbalistic thought is often at its most original.

II

A few preliminary remarks are necessary for understanding these texts. Kabbalistic speculations about evil and its origin, its development and its consequences, operate on two levels. On one level they deal with events in the human world, as in the biblical tale of the fall of Adam and Eve, but on another level, they are concerned with the world of the Divine itself. Thus, from the very start, a significant duality is introduced into the view of good and evil. Did good and evil first emerge and become realized in human action alone, or is there something in the constitution of the world, independent of man, in the action of God Himself, that causes the existence of good and evil? On the whole, the early Kabbalists stressed the latter aspect, finding a metaphysical foundation for evil in the very constitution of Creation, and from there drawing a connection between evil and the world of human action. On the other hand, we often find the opposite notion—i.e., that while good and evil may indeed have a metaphysical foundation in the nature of God's activity as Creator,

it is only potential being and not real existence; they only become real through human choice and action. A certain basic vacillation, or one could say, a dichotomous stance regarding this issue runs through all of Kabbalistic literature. However, in the older texts the dilemma is never open and obvious, although it is implied in certain important utterances. It first emerges clearly and explicitly only in the writings of the later Kabbalists, beginning in the sixteenth century. The major opus of classical Kabbalah, *Sefer ha-Zohar*, steered clear of this dilemma, as we shall see, unequivocally maintaining the metaphysical reality of the existence of evil.

To understand the various attitudes that come to light here, we must recall the fundamental Kabbalistic teaching of the ten *Sefiroth*, the potencies of divine being. This doctrine states that God as Creator—that is, the living God in His activity, as opposed to the concealed aspect of God, existing for Himself beyond any possibility of our knowing Him—manifested Himself in ten utterances of His being, ten radiations of His creative nature, ten emanations of His concealed essence, or whatever one of these ultimately symbolic descriptions is used. The *Sefiroth*, pulsating with the rhythm of the divine life and symbolically representing the life process of the Godhead, are in essence one in God, yet they reveal different aspects of God's creative activity. As discussed in the previous chapter, they have something of the mystical shape of the shapeless God. In their harmony, in their constitution by and oneness with divine being, they are the foundation of all created things, which emanate from them and are fashioned by them. So long as they act in their original harmony and unity, they are good; after all, they express God's will, which acts upon them in the form of the highest *Sefirah*. At the same time, the Kabbalists view the *Sefiroth* as constituting the scale of the highest spiritual and intellectual values that can be realized by human actions, by means of which human beings can bring about and maintain the blissful connection between Creation and its Creator. The primordial shape of man, rooted in the mystic primordial image of the Godhead, the *'Adam Kadmon*, can reflect the ray of divine light that entered it at Creation. Everything that strengthens this contact and harmonious connection

with the source of this primal shape comes from the world of good or, more precisely, reflects this world in human activity.

However, there are also tensions in the world of the *Sefiroth*, aspects of divine action that seem to us to be in conflict with each other, although they each have their place, like notes in a melody, in the dynamic oneness of the Godhead. In these tensions are the ultimate foundation of what appears to human beings as evil. Various schools of the early Kabbalah located the origin of a dialectic that releases evil at three different points within the Sefirotic system. Common to all of these reflections is an emphasis on the activity of one or another of these ten *Sefiroth*. God possesses an attribute of love that manifests itself in His workings and in His creatures—indeed, in an infinity of realms in which this *Sefirah* operates without hindrance—as a basic power of Creation. This divine love is the freely flowing and freely given good; its Hebrew designation, not by chance, combines the nuances of love, grace, and charity in the term *Hesed*. Its opposite number in the Sefirotic system is the quality of severity, self-containment, judgment, and therefore restricting power; in the language of the Kabbalists, this is known as *Gevurah* or *Middath ha-Din*. These two *Sefiroth* are the fourth and fifth in the structure of the Sefirotic tree but, from a different perspective, stand at the top of the seven lower *Sefiroth*. This latter grouping, which for the Kabbalists represents the primordial “seven days of Creation,” corresponds to the secret reality that was externalized during the seven days of Creation. Each one of these in its own way contains something of the two primal qualities of love and severity, which permeate them and are expressed by them in diverse ways. The three highest *Sefiroth*, to which there are no immediate counterparts in temporal Creation, represent the forces of divine planning—will, wisdom, and discernment—fully expressed in the labor of the seven days, both in the esoteric work of the archetypal Creation of the world of the seven *Sefiroth* within God Himself, and in the exoteric sense of the Creation outside of God. In these three highest *Sefiroth*, love and severity are not distinguished or separated from one another; they still rest in the depths of the undifferentiated divine will and wisdom. Only in the third *Sefirah* does a certain element of differentiation begin

to occur in those essences that were undivided in the divine wisdom; however, these essences are not yet crystallized into distinct *Sefiroth*. Here in *Binah* we find the womb of all Creation, a womb that maintains harmony in differentiation, the reconciliation of contradiction, the unity of conflicts that are about to erupt. Here, as the Kabbalists like to say, there are no severe judgments, yet it is here that we find the roots of severity in the powers of judgment.

This point is related to one of the previously mentioned Kabbalistic theories, which finds the ultimate root of evil in the law governing the continuation of the process of emanation from this point on. This view occurs in particular in the writings of R. Isaac ha-Cohen of Soria, a Castilian Kabbalist (ca. 1260), which were probably based upon earlier speculations.¹ According to this view, *Binah* released emanations in which the power of *Din* (severity) was released unmitigated, thereby breaking its connection with the other *Sefiroth* in which everything was mutually balanced. We find here the idea that such unrestrained and unmitigated action of *Middath ha-Din* must necessarily be expressed in realms and entities that are destructive by nature, and that by their nature cannot endure. According to his view, these are the destroyed primal worlds referred to in the midrash cited in the name of R. Abbahu from Caesarea: “The Holy One, blessed be He, created worlds and destroyed them, until He created this [present] one, and said: ‘This one gives Me pleasure, they did not give Me pleasure.’ ”² R. Isaac ha-Cohen related this idea to the verse: “Who are snatched away before their time, whose foundation was poured out as a stream” (Job 22:16). After a quasi-demonic eruption, these primal worlds returned to their source in *Binah*, their purely negative nature making it impossible for them to exist in a positive manner. There nevertheless remained vestiges of these destroyed and destructive primal worlds, which float about our universe like debris from extinct volcanoes. These, according to some Kabbalists, constitute the basis of evil in the Creation—that which has not reached its proper place, that which prematurely collapsed, an abortive start of Creation, so to speak. This concept recurs in several other parts of the *Zohar*, as well as in a slightly later, short text entitled *Masekhet Ḥatsiluth* (The Tractate on Emanation) that defines evil as a remnant of a being that was “initially rash”:³

“An estate may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed” (Prov. 20:21). This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, initially created worlds and destroyed them, trees and uprooted them, because they were hasty and jealous of one another. This is comparable to ten trees planted in a field in one long row, in which there is not even a hair’s breadth left between one tree and the next. Every tree wishes to rule over all and to draw all the moisture from the soil, so that all of them thereby become dried out; so it is with the worlds. “But the end thereof shall not be blessed”—the Holy One blessed be He removed His light from them, and the darkness remained to punish therein the wicked. That is “but the end thereof shall not be blessed.” [*Masekhet ’Atsiluth*, §4]

But the most important thinking on the position and nature of evil focused not on *Binah* but on the function of the *Sefirah* of *Din* itself. Here the Spanish Kabbalists returned to the earliest Kabbalistic texts, particularly *Sefer ha-Bahir*, at least one stratum of which explicitly identifies evil with *Middath ha-Din*—that is, with one of the modalities of divine activity.⁴ In principle, this view is not that remote from the attitude of the talmudic aggadah. The latter often goes so far as to personify God’s power of punishment, *Middath ha-Din*, as an autonomous entity: “The Quality of Severity spoke before God,” etc. It is clear here that *Middath ha-Din* plays the role of a prosecuting angel or, to put it tersely, Satan, who tries to arouse God’s punitive power by his accusations, and virtually represents it himself. Indeed, there are parallel passages in the aggadah in which the identical statements are attributed to *Middath ha-Din* and to Satan. Of course, one might argue that, in aggadic thinking, *Middath ha-Din* was a created being, distinct from God, so that its identification with Satan had no theosophic implication; that is, it does not pertain to the nature of the Deity. The case is rather different, however, for *Sefer ha-Bahir*, for whom God’s *Middath ha-Din* is not an angel, but one of the divine *logoi* or potencies of God’s activity in Creation: in other words, a *Sefirah*. (I have found no basis for the claim that the passages in *Sefer ha-Bahir* that identify evil, *Middath ha-Din*, and Satan with one another were not the

result of an internal development within Judaism, but instead were written under the influence of the Catharist doctrines widespread in southern France during the twelfth century.)

There was a significant difference between the attitude of *Sefer ha-Bahir* and that of the Spanish Kabbalah which culminates in the *Zohar*: namely, the simple equation of God's severity with the principle of evil was replaced here by a more subtle and complex reflection. (I will return to this later.) It is not clear what the author (or editor) of *Sefer ha-Bahir* thinks about the connection between the divine attribute of severity—which both confronts man with the choice between good and evil and passes judgment on his choice—and the moral nature of man, with the duality of his good and evil drives. It is precisely this confusion that *Sefer ha-Zohar* tries to clear up. In any event, for the early Kabbalah, in all its varieties, the solution to the problem of evil and its effects was primarily linked to the *Sefirah* of *Din*.

The pre-Zoharic Kabbalah knew of a third point in the Sefirotic system in terms of which the eruption of evil was understood: the final *Sefirah*, *Malkhuth*. Here, too, the fundamental thought is the same: so long as the *Sefirot*, especially those representing the antithetical aspects of divine action, work together harmoniously, the element of divine severity has no separate, autonomous existence; the restrictive and limiting element is canceled out in the world of divine unity. This obtains both for the connection between the *Sefirot* of *Hesed* and *Gevurah* (*Middath ha-Din*), as well as for the connection between the penultimate and ultimate *Sefirot* (*Yesod* and *Malkhuth*), which represent the connection between the male and female principles. It is only when these elements become isolated that severity appears, be it in its own *Sefirah* or in its activity within the last *Sefirah*, as a dark and dangerous element working evil.⁵

The earliest Spanish Kabbalists sought to express this idea in their reflections on the true meaning of Adam's sin, through which evil entered the human world. Profound insight into their way of thinking is offered by a passage in which, using the symbolism of the two trees in the Garden of Eden and of Adam's fall, it introduces what were to become central themes of the Kabbalah. We find here one of the most important formulations of the problem of evil in all of Kabbalistic litera-

ture. This passage, known as *Sod 'Ets ha-Da'ath* (The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge), deserves closer attention. Extant in several manuscripts, some anonymous and some attributed to R. Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, it reads as follows:⁶

Regarding the matter of the Tree of Knowledge, of which Adam was commanded not to eat: Fix your mind on this matter and as to why God kept him away from this tree more than from the others. Notice that, according to the wording in Scripture, He did not enjoin him against gathering [the fruit], but only against eating it. For Adam did not pluck and take the fruit, but the woman gave it to him, as is written, "And she gave also unto her husband" (Gen. 3:6). The Scriptural verse also only has Him saying: "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (v. 11). Likewise, Scripture says about the Tree of Life: ". . . lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (v. 22). From here we may infer that it is the act of eating that causes sin, and indeed, this is so. Know that the eating of the fruits of the Garden [of Eden] provided nourishment for the soul; therefore, he was punished for eating, which involves both body and soul. But the soul has no share or benefit in gathering the fruit: even though [he thereby brought about] a separation in the lower realms, it does not cause separation in the upper realms, but the soul only partakes in the act of eating the fruit, and is nourished by its fruits. But damage is caused [to the soul] if the fruit contains damaging things, and [things that] stimulate the Evil Urge and diminish it [the soul] in its rank and its health, and reduces its strength in the upper realm—and this was [Adam's] sin.

You already know that the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are one [tree] below but two [trees] above: the Tree of Knowledge is from the northern side, but the Tree of Life is from the eastern side, from whence light emanates into the entire world, and the potency of Satan is there. And it is written in the "Jerusalem Talmud" [i.e., in *Bahir*, S §109; M §162]: "What is Satan? This teaches that the Holy One blessed be He has a quality whose name is Evil, and it lies to the north of God, as is written, 'Out of the

north the evil shall break forth' (Jer. 1:14), and from the north it comes. And what is it? It is the form of the [left] hand, and it has many emissaries, and every single one of them is called Evil, Evil; however, there are among them lesser and greater ones, and they make the world culpable . . . ,” as it is written there. And it is also written in the above-quoted “Jerusalem Talmud” [*Bahir*, S §107; M §161]: “What is meant by, ‘And the Lord showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters’ (Exod. 15:25)? This refers to that Tree of Life that Satan threw down, etc.,” as it is written there.

Now this is the meaning: So long as the Tree of Life, which comes from the side of the east and is the Good Urge and the quality of peace [harmony], is connected with the Tree of Knowledge, which comes from the side of the north, from the side of Satan and evil, then Satan can do nothing, for the Tree of Life, which is the quality of peace [i.e., harmony], shall overwhelm him. But the moment it [the Tree of Knowledge] is separated [from the Tree of Life], its strength is freed and Satan is able to act. Therefore, when Satan wished to lead Israel astray [at Marah], he cast [the Tree of Life] away and separated it from them and tested Israel, and was therefore able to seduce Israel into sinning. And this is the matter known as “chopping down of the plantings” (*kitsuts baneti'oth*), for had he been connected [with the Tree of Life], he would have been unable to do this thing. Moreover, had Adam not first separated the fruit, Satan would have been unable to separate him from the Tree of Life.

And let the matter that he [Adam?] was not involved in the eating [that is, that he did not participate in the eating with Eve] not seem difficult to you; for he performed separation in his thought, which is more a part of the soul. For you already know that a human being is composed of all things,⁷ and his soul is connected to the supernal soul, for which reason the Torah states, “Ye shall be holy, for I am Holy” (Lev. 19:2), as well as, “Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy” (Lev. 20:7). Therefore, the righteous man, who raises his pure and immaculate soul to the supernal holy soul, unites with it and knows the future; and that is the meaning

of the prophet and his path, for the Evil Urge has no power over him to separate him from the upper soul. That is why the prophet's soul unites completely with the upper soul, and with his intellect fulfills the Torah, for they [the commandments] are incorporated within him [in his intellect]. That is why our sages said that the Patriarchs fulfilled the Torah in their intellect,⁸ and they said that the Patriarchs are themselves the *Merkavah*,⁹ and the same is also true of their children after them, and of every righteous man. About this, Scripture says, "And I will dwell among the children of Israel" (Exod. 29:45), for the Holy Spirit rests upon them and joins itself to them. But if a man walks in the path of evil, which is Satan, then he chops and separates his soul from the supernal soul; and concerning this it is written in the Torah, "and My soul shall abhor you" (Lev. 26:30)—that is, the soul is separated and distanced from the supernal soul, and this is like a chopping away. And that is why in the words "that ye should be defiled thereby" (Lev. 11:43), the Hebrew word [for "defiled"] *ve-nitmeitem*¹⁰ is written without an *'alef*—signifying that they are not worthy to have the crown of God's reign that animates everything [symbolized in the *'alef*] be on their heads, but they are culpable of death [because of their separation from the supernal soul and because they destroyed the divine unity].

It is written in the Prophets, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa. 59:2), and similar verses. And the Talmud says: "It is not the Serpent that kills, but sin that kills."¹¹ Hence, when Adam ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which is of the side of evil, and separated it [through his awareness or his contemplation] from the Tree of Life, the Evil Urge dominated him in his eating and in his soul, for his soul took part in the eating of the fruits of the Garden, as we said above. Thus, impurity and death and removal of the soul from the [supernal] soul took place [within Adam]. This explains that by his eating he caused destruction above and below in the plantings and separated the forces of the Tree of Knowledge by themselves, and separated them from the forces of the Tree of Life—and this is the great offense against both body

and soul, above and below, and that is why it is said of Adam that he chopped away at the plantings.¹² For after he separated the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which is of the side of evil, from the Tree of Life, and increased the strength of the Evil Urge and sated his soul with it, he separated the [lower] from the [upper] soul, and gave the emissaries of the Tree of Knowledge the strength to do evil, and he thereby separated the Tree of Knowledge from the Tree of Life, and also separated his soul from all the good qualities of the supernal soul, and united himself with the Evil Urge. . . .

And the Sages expressly said: “He is Satan, he is the Evil Urge, he is the Angel of Death.”¹³ For prior to his eating, Adam was completely spiritual and had the nature of the angels, like Enoch and Elijah; hence, he was worthy to eat of the fruits of Paradise, which are the fruits of the soul. And let not the expression “eating of the fruit” be difficult to you, for “eating” signifies enjoyment or benefit, as in [their saying], “‘Its flesh shall not be eaten’ (Exod. 21:28): this implies both the prohibition of eating and the prohibition of deriving benefit therefrom”¹⁴—and this refers to the benefit or enjoyment obtained by the soul. After that, it states—“Behold, the man is become as one of us” (Gen. 3:22). And the Sages said, “like the One of the world,”¹⁵ that is, he was composed of all [intellectual-spiritual] things and potencies. And the words “Behold, the man . . . ,” etc. refer to the time before he sinned; but now, in his sin, he has become mortal. Before sinning, he was worthy of eating of the fruits of the Garden, which were the fruits of the soul; therefore it was necessary to send him away from there. There was also another reason to drive him away from there: “lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life”—the Tree of Life which causes life, for it stems from the force of the “Bundle of Life”—“and eat, and live for ever”—for that is whence the strength of life comes from. And he was deprived of two things: the eating of the fruit of the Garden, which are life for the soul, just as the eating of [ordinary] fruit is life for the body; and the eating of the Tree of Life, which refers to eternal life. And it is to this that the two expressions refer: “He sent him forth” (v. 23), and “He drove out the man” (v. 24).

We learn from this passage something about Adam—that is, about human nature—and his connection to the Godhead and to the potencies of divine action, which are represented in the symbol of the trees of Paradise. The *Sefiroth* are often referred to among the Kabbalists as “plantings,” which grow, so to speak, out of the primal ground of the Godhead and of divine will. To “cause destruction” or to “chop down the plantings” is an allegorical expression used to refer to an act of contemplation whose practitioner does not embrace the totality of the *Sefiroth* in their unity, but instead isolates individual *Sefiroth*, particularly the last *Sefirah*, from that totality. As Adam prior to his fall was “a purely spiritual being,” his actions likewise took place on a purely spiritual plane, described allegorically in the Garden of Eden story. It is Adam’s task to cultivate the garden of these plantings—that is, to maintain and strengthen his contact (or *devekuth*) with spiritual reality, with which he had been imbued by his nature. Man is conceived as a microcosm (*‘olam katan*) into which all the elements and potencies of Creation have been placed, receiving everything and acting upon everything; his decision to preserve this connection and to contemplate the Divine without limit would fulfill the purpose of Creation. The Creator would thereby not only be glorified through His creature, but also reveal to him the true unity of all being in God—that is, the pure spirituality of being. Thus, the world of reflection or contemplation is the true world of action demanded of Adam in Paradise.

Man’s two urges or drives, for good and for evil, are implanted within him as possibilities of action, just as the qualities of love and severity are present in God Himself. Had Adam subordinated his will to that of God, in which all contradictions function in sacred harmony, then the restrictive factor within himself, the Evil Urge, would have been nullified within the totality of his being, and evil would never have emerged as a reality, but only remained as a potential, to be defeated repeatedly within the totality of his being. We learn here that evil is nothing other than that which isolates and removes things from their unity, a process profoundly symbolized by Adam’s relationship to the two trees in the Garden. The author does not tell us directly what those two trees are, but places them in some kind of relation to divine love and severity, without their being

synonymous with these qualities. On the contrary, it appears—especially from the use of this symbolism among the earlier Kabbalists—that the Tree of Life, coming from the mystical East, is a symbol for the *Sefirah* of *Yesod* (the Righteous One or the foundation of the world, whose symbolism will be discussed in the next chapter),¹⁶ identified in *Sefer ha-Bahir* as the “East side of the world.” The Tree of Knowledge, by contrast, is a symbol of the final *Sefirah*, in which “good and evil,” *Hesed* and *Din*, are united, operating through it in all the lower *Sefiroth*. Herein lies the importance of the symbolism used in our fragment, which lends profound meaning to the imagery in Genesis. The two trees are fundamentally one: they grow from a common root, in which masculine and feminine, the giving and the receiving, the creative and the reflective, are one. Life and knowledge are not to be torn asunder from one another: they must be seen and realized in their unity. So long as the two trees are connected, the Tree of Life retains control over the power of severity, the harsh, critical power within the Godhead, which for this author, following *Sefer ha-Bahir*, is conceived in the image of Satan. Severity, as a restrictive quality, tends to seek independent existence; however, this tendency is constantly overwhelmed by the flow of divine life and divine love, so that it remains a mere possibility—the “great fire of the Holy One blessed be He” (to employ the language of the *Bahir*), that only consumes when it is no longer confined within the framework of its original harmony. Satan’s independent being is thus a consequence of the decision made by Adam who, by his improper contemplation of the Divine, caused a separation within the Godhead that had a baleful effect on all of Creation. When he plucked and ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, he allowed the power acting in the Tree of Knowledge from the north (i.e., the principle of Severity) to operate upon it in isolation. This power was thereby removed from its position within the union of the *Sefiroth* and now gained control over Adam as the satanic principle of evil. The nature of evil is therefore the separation and isolation of those things that should be united. So long as man absorbs this separation into his being—this is the meaning here of the eating of the fruit, which belongs to the “fruits of the soul”—he creates inauthentic, false systems of reality, productive of evil—i.e., that which is separated from God. Both man’s experience of reality and his

moral nature are damaged by this misguided contemplation. Only through the acts of the righteous and the prophets, who annul this illegitimate separation of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, can man become reconnected to the original world of unity, in which evil will no longer be evil because it will have been restored to its proper place in the union of holiness. Even the Evil Urge within man, once marshaled in the totality of his struggle to restore his pristine unity, thereby loses its satanic element and itself serves the good.

According to the early Kabbalists, this act of separation made the world of human experience become coarse and material. It is obvious that this conception transfers the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil entirely to the side of evil, which probably explains why such a profound and influential interpretation was often held by other Kabbalists to be too radical. The latter tried to posit this same primordial harmony in the Tree of Knowledge itself: a harmony that was only destroyed by the rash and untimely separation of the fruit from the tree, whose detachment from its source brought about its destruction. The symbolism perceived in the tale of Paradise varies from one account to another; what is common to all these Kabbalists is the perception of evil as an entity existing in isolation, and evil action as the separation of being from its proper place. This tendency to separate that which by its true nature ought to be connected is paralleled by a corresponding tendency to combine that which ought to be separate by nature—that is, the creation of illegitimate unity. This, according to the *Zohar*, is the deceitful demiurgic presumption of magic, a virtually inevitable consequence of the irruption of evil into the world.¹⁷

III

We have thus far investigated the view that evil achieved reality only through human action, in which one sphere of the Divine Being was isolated and separated from the sacred union in which it had existed. This concept is certainly appropriate to the nature of moral evil. However, the Kabbalists recognized an additional realm of evil beyond this, a

modality independent of man and his works, which they designated as the realm of Satan or of Gehinnom (Hell or Purgatory). The central source for this view, so crucial to Jewish mysticism, is *Sefer ha-Zohar*, where evil is understood as an entity with its own, preordained place. Other contemporaneous doctrines within the Spanish Kabbalah express different tendencies, in which the reality of evil is relative; evil is seen there as an entity that has been usurped to the wrong place, but that would be good in its rightful place—an idea similar to that cited from *Sod 'Ets ha-Da'ath* in the previous section.

Let us examine these different views more closely. Their common denominator seems to me to be the assumption that, fundamentally, all of the divine potencies wish to operate in the existential realms of Creation. A multitude of worlds are attached to each and every *Sefirah*, filled with its potencies, that break out of the divine realm and realize the particular essence of that *Sefirah* in descending degrees. This doctrine is presented most clearly in the Hebrew writings of Joseph Gikatilla; thus, his *Sha'arei Orah* offers a detailed description of the emanations and worlds flowing from the *Sefirah* of *Hesed*.¹⁸ According to this view, one might easily assume the emanation from *Middath ha-Din* of ever lower and coarser manifestations of the power of severity; it would be consistent with its intrinsic nature, as with that of each of the lower seven *Sefiroth* operating in the world, to become manifested in such externalizations. This tendency is inherent in the creative exuberance in the nature of the *Sefirah* itself, and is not the result of some unique catastrophe or dramatic event which inhibits the unfolding of pure goodness.

Applied to our problem, all this means the following: divine severity, expressed in the biblical image of the fire of wrath burning in God (an image taken up much later by Jacob Boehme in a similar context), is a holy quality within the divine totality. So long as it operates within the union of all the *Sefiroth*, it is not evil, although it is the source of evil (as Boehme put it, the *Urqual*, the primal source of evil). However, in its exuberance this fire bursts outward, becoming independent in a surge of strength; in this new modality, severity is no longer mitigated or balanced by the other forces within the divine dynamic, but operates as the power of evil in Creation. Moreover, the author of the *Zohar* specifically imputes

a special meaning to this process within the *Sefirah* of *Gevurah*. He hardly speaks about the independence of the other *Sefiroth*; the Sefirotic system remains closed within itself until it is manifested within the hierarchy of the created worlds through the medium of the last *Sefirah*. Only at this one point, that of the fire or Severity within God, is there any mention of an exterior outburst of power, *Tokpa de-Dina*. This is no doubt connected to characteristic Zoharic notions of the Godhead as an organism. In numerous passages and in the most diverse images, evil is conceived of as a product of separation and excretion, facilitating the maintenance of the organism in its original structure. The fire of divine severity melts and refines the power of judgment, known as the sacred gold; however, the dross is externalized, becoming the “shells” (*kelippoth*) in which the holy is either nonexistent, or present only as a spark, concealed and glowing within the dross. In the language of the *Zohar*, this is the *Sitra Aḥra*, the “Other Side,” which is the opposite of the holy and schemes to seize it and draw it over to its own side. Thus, both the nature and the origin of evil are explained in terms of one unified view. The Other Side is the fire of divine severity, externalized and made independent, where it becomes an entire hierarchical system, a counterworld ruled by Satan.¹⁹ The details of this system, as they are expressed in the *Zohar* and other Kabbalistic writings, belong to the realm of the mythology and demonology of the Kabbalah, with which we are not concerned here. Indeed, the *Zohar* passages concerning the *Sitra Aḥra* have a clearly mythological stamp. The reason for this is not to be sought in the historical origins of the Sefirotic doctrine and demonology as such, but rather in the fact that genuine evil, the evil that can be experienced, cannot be explained and broken down by speculation. From the myth of the Tree of Knowledge down to the present day, evil imposes itself upon us in mythical images. The image of the “Other Side” as an imitation of the side of holiness, which entered Kabbalistic thought through the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, belongs to this realm.

The above exposition assists us in understanding a significant passage in the *Zohar* (I, 17a–b), which infers this connection between good and evil from the story of Creation and from a reading of the biblical account of Korah. The passage reads as follows:

“And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters’” (Gen. 1:6). Here, there is an allusion to the separation of the upper from the lower waters, through that which is called “the secret of the left (hand)” [i.e., the attribute of judgment]. For up to this point the text has alluded to the secret of the right, but now it alludes to the secret of the left; and therefore there was an increase in discord between this and the right. It is the nature of the right to harmonize the whole, and therefore everything is written with the right [hand], since it is the source of harmony. When the left awoke there awoke discord, and through that discord the wrathful fire was reinforced and there emerged from it Gehinnom, which thus originated from the left and adheres to it. Moses in his wisdom pondered over this and drew a lesson from the work of Creation. In the work of Creation there was an antagonism of the left against the right, and the division between them allowed Gehinnom to emerge and to fasten itself to the left. Then the Central Column, which is the third day, intervened and allayed the discord between the two sides, so that Gehinnom descended below, and the left became absorbed in the right and there was peace over all. Similarly, the quarrel of Korah with Aaron was an antagonism of the left against the right. Moses, reflecting upon what had happened during the Creation, said: “It seems proper to me to settle the difference between the right and the left.” He therefore tried to effect an accord between the two. The left, however, was not willing, and Korah proved obdurate. Moses thereupon said: “Surely Gehinnom is embittering this quarrel. The left ought to strive upwards and absorb itself in the right. Korah has no wish to attach himself to the higher realms and to merge himself in the right. Let him, then, descend below in the impetus of its wrath.” The reason why Korah refused to allow the quarrel to be settled by the intervention of Moses was that he had not entered upon it for a truly religious motive, and that he had scant regard for the glory of God, and refused to acknowledge His creative power. When Moses perceived that he [Korah] had thus placed himself outside the pale, he “was very wroth” (Num. 17:15). Moses was “wroth” because he was not able to settle the quarrel. . . . Korah denied this power

wholly, both in the higher and lower sphere . . . [Korah] fought against heaven itself and sought to deny the words of the Torah. The conflict was certainly of the following of Gehinnom, and therefore Korah remained attached to it. All of these secrets are revealed in the Book of Adam. It says there that, when Darkness asserted itself, it did so with fury, and created Gehinnom, which attached itself to it in that quarrel we have mentioned [between light and darkness]. But as soon as the wrath and the fury abated there arose a conflict of another kind, to wit, a quarrel of love . . . which obtained the approval of Heaven. This is indicated by our text. It says first: "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide, etc." This refers to the beginning of quarrel, the outburst of passion and violence. There was a desire for reconciliation, but meanwhile Gehinnom arose before the wrath and passion had cooled down. Then "God made the firmament, etc."—that is, there emerged a quarrel of love and affection, which made for the permanence of the world. And in this category is the dispute between Shammai and Hillel, the result of which was that the Oral Torah approached in a loving mood the Written Law, so that they mutually supported each other. . . .

Separation is thus associated . . . with the left, at its first impetus, when it first enters on a quarrel in wrath and violence, giving birth to Gehinnom before the fury subsides.²⁰

The author of the *Zohar* associates the doctrine of evil as a metaphysical reality with his other speculations concerning moral evil and the Evil Urge in man by identifying it with one of the forces of the Other Side. Adam did not cause evil to be aroused by his sin, but merely allowed it to enter; he did not produce evil, but enabled it to adhere to him. Since that time, man has lived in this tension of opposites, and his choice, rather than establishing harmony between them, has actually exacerbated them. Every human action since then has entailed a decision in favor of one side or the other: man may seek to join himself to the lost unity and harmony of the Divine by obeying the divine will revealed in the Torah, or else may follow the path of the Other Side, thereby repeating the primordial sin and strengthening the power of evil, which is seen by the

Zohar as hostile to life itself. The commandments of the Torah, according to many Kabbalists, are opportunities for this decision. Evil, insofar as it is separated from God, is unfruitful per se, and only human sin, which diverts the vitality of the world and the influx of the good and the holy to the realm of the Other Side, provides it with its demonic power of fertility.²¹ Indeed, once removed from its joint root with the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge itself becomes a “Tree of Death.”

We thus come to a notion that played a major role, not only in *Sefer ha-Zohar*, but in later Kabbalah and in Hasidic thought: namely, that a spark of the divine light shines even in evil. There is no complete separation between the two realms: evil has no existence as pure evil, as the polar opposite of the good; on the contrary, the two realms are interlaced. This point is sharply underscored in the Kabbalists’ reflections on evil, and sharply underscored in the Kabbalists’ reflections on evil, and holds true not only for the metaphysical view of evil discussed thus far, but also for the domain of human action, the two drives of good and evil ultimately entering into every human action. This interlacing is what makes man’s own unprejudiced analysis of the morality of his conduct so endlessly difficult; it also (and this point is emphasized in the ethics of the later Kabbalah) facilitates the chance of bringing all deeds back into the sphere of the good. There is nothing so depraved that it cannot be returned to its source, thanks to this spark of the divine within it. This basic idea was clear to the Kabbalists, and closer to their hearts than the answer to the obvious question: how did this spark from the world of good come to have wandered into the sphere of evil? Here we again encounter the same two fundamental motifs found in our previous discussion. One theory states that, independent of human conduct, such a spark from the primordial light fell into the so-called “Emanation of the Left Hand”—the system of the *Sitra Aħra*—and is still glowing within the slag of evil. It could be argued that this spark was drawn there during the eruption of that emanation, and is now held captive, so to speak, awaiting its redemption to be returned home. This was the theory of Lurianic Kabbalah: upon the “Breaking of the Vessels,” that great drama in the Sefirotic world that constituted the turning point in the theosophic process, elements of the Sefirotic configuration were swept along in the

downward plunge. The vessels formed within these supernal structures in order to contain the light of the divine essence broke asunder as a result of their own immanent law, in which was inherent the possibility of transformation of the internal into the external—that is, an outward turning of the force of divine Creation. Along with the shards of these shattered vessels, from which the “shells” or *kelippoth* were thereafter formed, a few sparks of the inner light from the world of *’Adam Kadmon* likewise broke away and descended. It is these sparks (*nitsozoth*) that now shine even in those spheres over which evil gains control. Their activity is strangely ambivalent: on the one hand, these sparks animate evil, guaranteeing its existence and its power of action; on the other, they are like captives, awaiting their own redemption from evil. The Kabbalists disagreed as to whether the removal of these sparks would destroy the sphere of evil, by depriving it of its vitality, or whether it would redeem evil as well, transforming it and returning it to the reconstituted harmony of things. These two opinions coexisted alongside one another.

The question of the eschatological destiny of Creation—an issue that played such a tremendous role in the Kabbalah of Safed and its offshoots—is related to this issue. This is likewise the source of the Hasidic doctrine that strongly emphasized the “bringing back” of evil to its source within holiness at the time of the Redemption. A mystical pun served as a vehicle for this ancient idea: God’s creative power is expressed in His seventy-two “names,” already known to the Babylonian *Ge’onim*, one of which, according to ancient tradition, was Sa’el. Only when evil became independent (as discussed above) and the principle of death penetrated into Creation was this aspect of the Divine transformed into Samael, Satan’s name in Jewish literature, in which the consonant *m* alludes to the principle of death (*maveth*). But the strength of that primordial holy name still shines within the satanic, and will regain its original power at the time of the Redemption, when the principle of evil will reintegrate into holiness. It is not clear whether the principle of evil would be annihilated completely or “suspended” (in the dual sense of being “terminated” and also “elevated”). In any event, both answers were plausible ones in the Kabbalistic tradition.

The other motif associates this influx of light, which burns even in

darkness, with human deeds. Sin is that which brings evil to life; man's transgression against the divine will diverts these sparks of the Holy away from the place where they really belong. In Kabbalistic theory, this proximity and interlacing of good and evil finds its classical expression in the notion of a sphere in which these two emanations are blended, and which has special significance as the source of souls—namely, *kelippath nogah*, the “brilliant shell.” This conception originated in a mystical reading of Ezekiel's vision of the *Merkavah*, in which the prophet saw “a stormy wind come out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it; and out of the midst thereof as the color of electrum, out of the midst of the fire” (1:4). This world of *kelippath nogah* is actually a Luciferian world, belonging to the domain of shells and hence of evil, but is penetrated by a brilliance from the world of the *Sefiroth* that shines within it, so that the realms of good and evil appear uncannily blended. The souls that originate in this realm bear the stigma of this unresolved essential conflict. According to Lurianic Kabbalah, man's natural soul, with all its powers, derives from this source of *kelippath nogah*, and hence enjoys the possibility of choice between good and evil that is the lot of every human being, even without the influence of the divine soul within him stemming from the light of the *Sefiroth*. The doctrine of *kelippath nogah*, particularly as developed at the end of R. Hayyim Vital's *‘Ets Hayyim*, is the classical form in which the Zoharic doctrine, according to which the world of evil is independent of man but rooted in the dialectics of emanation itself, became most widely known and influential.

IV

In contrast with these ideas, in other Kabbalistic writings we find a further development of the motif with which we have already become acquainted in R. Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona's *Sod ‘Ets ha-Da‘ath*. The most impressive formulation of this trend, under a new guise, appears in R. Joseph Gikatilla's brief treatise, *Sod ha-Nahash u-Mishpato* (The Mystery of the Serpent and its Sentence), in which we find a doctrine competing

with the contemporaneous doctrine of the *Zohar*. Using a bizarre linking of the two elements, Gikatilla writes about the origin of evil:

Know that there are thirty-five princes of the left holding onto Isaac, by means of Edom and by means of Amalek; and know that Amalek is the head of the primeval serpent, and he holds fast unto the serpent, and the serpent is his chariot. . . . And in the same place ("Refidim") the serpent and Amalek are found mating as one, as is written, "The way of a serpent upon a rock" (Prov. 30:19). . . . And know that from the beginning of his creation, the serpent served an important and necessary purpose for the harmony of Creation, so long as he remained in his place. He was a great servant, created to bear the yoke of mastery and service, and his head reached to the heights of the earth, and his tail reached into the depth of Hell. For he had a suitable place in all the worlds, and constituted something extremely important for the harmony of all levels, each in its place. And that is the secret of the heavenly serpent, known from *Sefer Yetsirah*, who sets all the spheres of Heaven into motion and makes them orbit from east to west and from north to south.²² And without him, no creature in the entire sublunar world would have life, and there would be no sowing and no growth, and no inducement for the procreation of all creatures.

Originally, this serpent stood outside the walls of the sacred precincts, and was linked from the outside to the outer wall, for the back of his body was connected to the wall, while its face was turned toward the outside. He did not have the right to go inside, but his place and law was to see to the work of growth and procreation from the outside, and that is the secret of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Therefore, God warned Adam not to touch the Tree of Knowledge—so long as good and evil were both connected in the tree, for one was inside and the other was outside—until he waited to separate the *'orlah*, which constitutes the first fruit [of the tree] (Lev. 19:23ff)—"ye shall count the fruit thereof as forbidden" (Lev. 19:23). But Adam did not wait, "and he took of the fruit" (Gen. 3:6) prematurely, and thus brought "an idol into the Holy of Holies,"²³ so that the force of impurity came

from the outside into the inside. . . . Know that when all of God's works are each in its place, they are good in this place of their creation, as assigned to them and predetermined for them; but when they rebel and leave their legitimate places, then they are evil, and that is why it is written in Isaiah 45:7: "I make peace and create evil."²⁴

This passage is a remarkable one. On the one hand, we learn of the existence of Gehinnom or the sphere of evil, which is no more than an empty framework, a potential which, had the processes of Creation been left to follow the undisturbed course of life, would not have begun functioning at all, but would have remained indolent in its own hidden existence. The serpent itself represents the evil inherent in the Tree of Knowledge, indeed, God's creative power in the process of devolving outward. But for Adam's interference and rash action, the serpent [i.e., the manifestation of God's creative power] would never have become evil, as it would not have lost its unmediated connection with the "walls of the sacred precincts." Put differently, the serpent is the "genius of nature."²⁵ Adam's sin, the perversion of human will, twisted the direction of the serpent so that, instead of doing justice to its task of "the service of growth and procreation from the outside," it tried to penetrate into the realm of the sacred precincts. He usurped a position that was not befitting to him; it was this perversion of the direction of his activity that turned the benign genius of nature into the satanic bearer of the demiurgical arrogance of evil. This was the paradoxical answer to the old question of how the serpent came to enter Paradise, where he had no reason to be.²⁶ In the oldest illustrations of the scene of Genesis 3 (discussed by Luise Troje in a fine paper),²⁷ the serpent is seen curling over the wall of Paradise. Gikatilla's mythic description sounds like a later theosophic reading of such a depiction. If one brings something that belongs outside into the precinct of the Holy, he destroys the innate harmony of things; it is this disruption of the proper order of things that this Kabbalistic myth associates with the nature of evil.²⁸

This tendency clearly runs counter to the doctrine of the separation of the emanation of the left side from the holy. However, this latter theme

became a vital one in Kabbalistic literature alongside the former one, even though in principle the two motifs run counter to each other. They both appear, for example, in the writings of R. Meir ibn Gabbai who in 1531, on the eve of the new Kabbalistic developments in Safed, made an especially impressive summary of the teachings of the earlier Kabbalists in his work *‘Avodath ha-Kodesh*. Underlying the polarity of good and evil is not only the separation of things that are meant to be connected, but also the mingling of those realms meant to be separate. The goal of Jewish religious life, according to these Kabbalists, is to do away with this polarity and to abolish the infinite tension inherent therein.

We have seen how the *Zohar* posits the actual existence of evil as emerging from the fire of God's wrath and its residues, from which it turns outward and becomes independent. Gikatilla, by contrast, views evil as having only a potential existence, which is actualized and becomes real through human action. Without this latter action, the entire hierarchy of the Left Side remains pure potentiality. This notion was subsequently adopted by R. Israel Sarug (ca. 1600), to whom we owe one of the most influential presentations of the Lurianic Kabbalah, albeit totally inconsistent with Luria's original teachings.²⁹ This notion is reiterated in all of the writings influenced by Sarug during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁰ Naftali Bacharach, author of *‘Emek ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1648), states concerning the world of the demonic:

Before Adam sinned, good overcame evil, and the powers of evil had not yet crossed over from potentiality to actuality, but were still concealed in a subtle potentiality and did not give birth to demons, spirits and sucubii—like a wick in oil, which one draws with its light into the oil, so that it burns there and illuminates only itself and does not go outside. [p. 121b]

This image first appears in the Spanish Kabbalist Isaac ha-Cohen regarding the primal worlds that were annihilated and returned to the *Sefirah* of *Binah*, like a wick returned to the oil. The author of *‘Emek ha-Melekh* goes on to say that it was Adam who, in his sin,

kindled the fire of Judgment everywhere and corrupted all the worlds with it, so that even the air of the lands of the nations was corrupted by the host of the princes of impurity, who are literally objects of pagan worship; and each one took his portion and his land . . . and we have an absolute obligation to repair the external air. . . . And particularly because we are learned in Torah, we are obligated to repair the air of the lands of the seventy nations with the breath of Torah which emerges from our mouths. And when that air is repaired to its limit, the Messiah will come to redeem us and will conquer the entire world under his dominion, and then good will overcome evil, as it was. (*Emek ha-Melekh*, p. 121b)

V

We have now become familiar with the main answers given by the earlier Kabbalists to questions about the existence and nature of evil. These notions, of the most diverse forms, essentially boil down to the view of evil as a disturbance of the harmony of the world, or as originating in human conduct. In terms of Kabbalistic symbolism, evil is always linked to the emanation of God's creative power. The same holds for the idea of the destroyed primal worlds (briefly touched on here), which was transformed by the Lurianic Kabbalah into the doctrine of the Breaking of the Vessels. According to this view, evil arose as a residue of the forces released by this breaking, which then took shape as the independent, life-hostile realms of the "Other Side."

But R. Isaac Luria and his closest disciples took a step toward an even bolder conception when they introduced an entirely new element into Kabbalistic thought: the idea of *tsimtsum*, God's self-contraction, as the primal act occurring prior to any emanation.³¹ This doctrine perceived the totality of the processes of emanation from *'Ein-Sof* as intending from the start to remove the forces of severity and evil from the sacred union of the Godhead, from whence they sprang into existence. Prior to the act of *tsimtsum*, the "roots of severity," the potencies of the fire of divine wrath, were hidden within the infinite essence of the Godhead itself.

They were swallowed up within the light of the infinite, indeed, were themselves infinite light, yet they contained the seed of all dark things. From the moment of *tsimtsum* on, the process of Creation was meant to carry out in full this immanent dialectics, in accordance with the law that everything concealed within God must achieve its complete realization. The goal of all those processes that began with *tsimtsum*—i.e., the concentration of these seeds, the “roots of severity,” in the center of *’Ein-Sof*—was to make the light of the Infinite ever clearer, purer, and more harmonious. The very thought of Creation disturbed the harmony of the potencies within the *’Ein-Sof*; *tsimtsum*, as it were, upset the inner equilibrium of the *’Ein-Sof*. The forces of *Din* concentrated by means of *tsimtsum* gathered extra force, which could only be balanced by developing these forces and excreting their dross in order to restore the harmony of Creation within which *’Ein-Sof* is reflected. The progressive purification and refinement of these dark powers of judgment, and the liberation of their residues, is the ultimate purpose of all the events of Creation. But the act of *tsimtsum* itself, in which God limits Himself, requires the establishment of the power of *Din*, which is a force of limitation and restriction.

Thus, the root of evil ultimately lies in the very nature of Creation itself, in which the harmony of the Infinite cannot, by definition, persist; because of its nature as Creation—i.e., as other than Godhead—an element of imbalance, defectiveness, and darkness must enter into every restricted existence, however sublime it may be. It is precisely the rigorously theistic tendency of Lurianic Kabbalah that requires evil as a factor necessarily inherent in Creation per se, without which Creation would instantly lose its separate existence and return to being absorbed in the Infinite. The stronger the manifestation of this element of darkness in the World of Emanation—as a result of *tsimtsum* and the Breaking of the Vessels—the greater the chance of subduing, refining, and purifying it. The existence of evil *in potentia*, indeed, of Satan himself, is rooted in God; but whereas prior to *tsimtsum* it was included in the light of the Infinite, which contains the seeds of darkness, evil becomes progressively more independent during the course of a dialectic process in which, on the one hand, God continually restricts Himself through repeated acts of *tsimtsum* and, on the other, He manifests His potencies by means of the

Sefirotic system. The question as to why God did not create a perfect world, Himself being perfection, would have seemed absurd to the Kabbalists of the Lurianic school: a perfect world cannot be created, for it would then be identical to God Himself, who cannot duplicate Himself, but only restrict Himself. The naive expectation that God would reproduce Himself is alien to the Kabbalists. Precisely because God cannot reproduce Himself, His Creation must be based upon that estrangement—one might indeed employ the Hegelian term *Entfremdung*—in which evil is embodied within Creation so that it may be itself. The continuity of this dialectic process, from the first act of *tsimtsum* on down, is repeatedly emphasized in the authentic presentations of Luria's doctrine. In this respect Luria clearly took a significant step beyond the intellectual world of the *Zohar*, in that he found the starting point of evil not in one or another point in the Sefirotic structure but in the very act of God's self-contraction within His own being.

Kabbalistic thinking went astonishingly far without becoming heretical. However, a further step was taken by the heretical Kabbalah of R. Nathan of Gaza, both in his *Sefer ha-Beri'ah* (The Book of Creation; 1671) and in his other writings.³² Nathan was the prophet and theologian of the Kabbalistic Messiah Sabbatai Zevi; his entire daring and eccentric system of thought is devoted to explaining the paradoxical messianic mission of the "holy sinner," Sabbatai Zevi, in terms of the constitution of the Creation itself—a doctrine developed by Nathan based upon his bold development of and innovation upon Lurianic ideas. I cannot discuss this aspect of his thought here,³³ which is highly significant for the most recent phase of Kabbalah. However, I would like to show how Nathan went beyond Luria in his attempt to fathom the nature of good and evil.

According to R. Nathan, not everything concealed within *'Ein-Sof* is ultimately meant to be expressed in Creation. According to him, there have always been two lights burning in the *'Ein-Sof* and filling its being, somewhat analogous to the attributes of the Spinozan God. Nathan refers to these as "the thought-filled light" and "the thought-less light" (*or she-yesh bo mahshavah* and *or she-ein bo mahshavah*). The former is an aspect of the divine light, containing the thought of Creation from the very outset. But together with this there exists in God a light in which this thought

was absent; instead, the entire nature of this light was to rest in itself and to emanate unto itself, without leaving the realm of *'Ein-Sof*. It constitutes, so to speak, that attribute of God that is hidden from us; whatever it may actually be or in whatever hidden manner it may express itself there, from our point of view it is passive, restrained, and self-absorbed. For Nathan this latter aspect of the Divine is by far the dominant one. The thought-filled light has, from the very start, an element of form, while the thought-less light negates all forms and wants nothing but its own essence. The acts of *tsimtsum* only took place within that light which contained the thought of Creation, allowing that light to actualize its thought, to project it onto the primordial space of Creation (*tahiru*), and to erect there the structure of Creation. Once this light retreated from the primordial space released by the *tsimtsum*, however, the thought-less light, which had no part in this act, remained there. Since this light wanted nothing but itself, it exerted passive resistance against the emanations created by the thought-filled light in *'Ein-Sof*, and thereby became *eo ipso* the source of evil in Creation. The idea of the dualism of form and matter as being good and evil here assumed a highly original form. The primary source of evil is an element opposed to Creation within God Himself; an element that wishes to prevent the completion and forming of Creation, not because this element is evil, but rather because it wants nothing outside of *'Ein-Sof* itself to exist. The thought-filled light thus enters into a primal conflict with a realm in *'Ein-Sof* that does not wish to be penetrated by it and, in resisting this formation, tries to destroy the structures created by it. When the thought-filled light penetrated into primordial space, it only penetrated (according to this conception) into the upper half of the realm freed for Creation by the *tsimtsum*. The lower half, called *Golem* or *'Umka de-Tehoma Rabba* ("Formless Matter" or "The Depths of the Great Deep"), however, remained entirely filled by the thought-less light which, through its effect upon Creation, became the destructive principle and the root of evil. This struggle takes place on every level of the cosmogonic process: it is not perceived as a struggle between two hostile principles, but rather as one between two aspects of one and the same Godhead. All the structures and images of Creation are brought into existence by the thought-less light, at that moment when it

is forced by thought to raise its potentiality into actuality. To the extent that the "Formless Matter" does agree to acquire form, it becomes a principle of construction, while insofar as it refuses to do so it is the root of evil.³⁴

This conception approaches dualistic thinking, insofar as one can do so within the framework of monotheism. One might say that, in this conception, two aspects of the Godhead, His creative will and His self-contemplation and absorption, were separated from one another by the act of *tsimtsum*. This division brought about the essential conflict whose unfolding constitutes the drama of the world, and also provides the key for the understanding of good and evil. By its resistance to the structures of the thought-filled light, the thought-less light fashions its own structures, which for us represent the *Sitra Aħra*. But even if this system is of a destructive nature, this is so due to the positive wish that nothing exist but the self-absorbed, balanced light of the *’Ein-Sof*, whose primal thought revolves, not around Creation, but upon Itself.

Creation could not proceed without this substratum. The further the process of the world's coming about proceeds, the deeper the interpenetration of these two lights—one of which, because of its resistance to the brightness of thought, appears as darkness—and the more acute the conflict between them. These two developments go hand in hand. The ultimate goal is a state in which the shaping will of Creation, the thought-filled light, will permeate the *tahiru*, the space vacated by the *tsimtsum*, and will fashion and form every element of the thought-less light, thereby bringing about an equilibrium between the two. Here, too, the world process is conceived as a harmony of the two basic powers, rather than as the final victory of one element over the other. At the time of the Redemption, the rays of the thought-filled light will penetrate to the dark "lower half" of the scene of Creation, the abyss whose depths contain the thought-less principle, lacking in shape. At the Redemption, all shapeless things will be shaped. But, at this point, there enters into the heart of this entire conception the highly bizarre thesis that the soul of the Messiah derives specifically from the thought-less light—that is, from that element within Godhead that is lacking in all form and wishes to dissolve all structure. This antagonistic element, albeit transfigured

and incomprehensibly purified, is concealed within the Messiah himself. Therefore, Nathan could advance the bold thesis, highly significant in the history of religion, that the root of the Messiah's soul stems from the abyss of evil and formlessness, as well as the idea that, even when it comes into contact with the thought-filled light, it still manifests its original nature in strange outbursts of antinomianism. But as interesting and unusual as this facet of Sabbatian speculation may be, I do not want to go into it here, as our present concern is with understanding the basic ideas of the Kabbalists concerning the age-old problem of good and evil.

The tremendous agitation that came into the world with the Book of Job and its daring questioning of God led Jewish mysticism to examine the problematics within the Godhead itself and its ways of working, as we have tried to present them here. One of the great questions of philosophy is whether an answer can be given to this problem on a purely human level—precisely when philosophy seeks to comprehend the reality of evil and not evade the issue—without entering into the paradoxical universe of theosophic thinking.

Tsaddik:
THE
RIGHTEOUS ONE

I

In the sources of the Jewish tradition, the religious ideals of Judaism have crystallized around three ideal human types that carry special significance: the *Tsaddik*, the righteous man; the *Talmid Ḥakham*, the scholar of sacred texts; and the *Ḥasid*, the pious person.¹ For the present discussion we must distinguish between the scholar and the other two types. The position and function of the scholar was of paramount importance in a religious society that saw the study of the divine word and its transmission by the living carriers of tradition as among its supreme values. The esteem for the concentrated spiritual effort entailed in the elucidation of the divine word placed intellect at the summit of the scale of religious values. It is difficult to overestimate the significance given to such intellectual effort in the context of a society that was intent not on originality and innovation but on grasping the truth of the Revelation and developing its continual application to the behavior of the individual and of the

community. There thus arose the ideal—fascinating in its rationality and its sobriety—of the scholar as the educational ideal of rabbinic Judaism, an ideal that restrained and pushed aside the demands of the voluntaristic and emotional spheres of life. The impact of this ideal was so powerful and enduring that the other ideal figures, the righteous and the pious individuals, tend to be associated with it, even though in terms of their own natures they are quite independent.

The *Tsaddik* and the *Hasid* are ideal types defined, not in terms of their understanding of the Torah, but of the efforts they make toward its fulfillment. Granted, meeting the demands of the Law *ipso facto* compels one to make an effort to understand it and—one could argue—even presupposes such an effort: “A boor cannot be fearful of sin, nor can an ignorant man be a *Hasid*.” Nevertheless, we are dealing here with a separate sphere, in which the moral and religious strength of the personality ultimately counts for more than its intellectual rank. In the following discussion, we shall deal with concepts and notions from this sphere.

Hebrew literary usage, especially popular usage, tends to confuse or even conflate the terms *Tsaddik* and *Hasid*, which are often used together as if they were synonyms. Basically, however, when used accurately, “righteous” and “pious” connote very different concepts in the Jewish tradition. The righteous man, no matter how elevated his position may be, exists on a lower level than the pious one, although already in the talmudic literature some features of the latter are combined with those of the former. A comment such as that in *Avoth de-Rabbi Nathan* (end of chap. 8, ed. Schechter, p. 38) that the “early *Tsaddikim*” (as opposed to the later ones) were *Hasidim* presumes a clear distinction between the two categories, which became connected over the course of time. Rudolf Mach’s book offers a wealth of material, both about the exact definition of the *Tsaddik*, as well as the extension of the concept, which often brings it so close to the figure of the *Hasid* as to be virtually indistinguishable from it.²

In classical rabbinic usage the righteous person, like the scholar, is viewed with great sobriety. He is one who strives to fulfill the Law and who succeeds, at the very least, in making his merits outnumber his transgressions. There is often a legalistic nuance involved, whereby “right-

teous" has the specific sense of one found innocent by a court of law.³ "A man is judged by the majority of his deeds"⁴—the righteous man being the one who passes the test of this judgment. Even one who is completely successful in meeting the demands of the Torah would be considered no more than a righteous man. The attainment of this level requires no more than a decision of the will and exertion of human effort; no special grace is necessary. It is an ideal accessible to all.

The *Hasid*, the pious man, is an altogether different matter. For rabbinic Judaism, whereas the righteous man is the ideal embodiment of the norm, the pious man is the extraordinary type. He is the radical Jew who goes to an extreme in attempting to realize his destiny. This extremism—as inseparable from the nature of the pious man as it is alien to that of the righteous one—may assume the most diverse forms, which have indeed been practiced by devotees of pietistic ideals over the centuries.⁵ However, its essential nature is always the same: the *Hasid* carries out not only what is demanded of him, that which is good and just in the eyes of the Law, but goes beyond the letter of the Law. Just as God "strengthens His mercies over His anger and behaves with His children according to the Attribute of Mercy, and goes with them beyond the letter of the Law," and hence is called *Hasid*, so does the earthly *Hasid* behave, with God's help. He demands nothing of his fellow, and everything of himself. Even when carrying out a prescription of the Law, he acts with such radical exuberance and punctiliousness that an entire world is revealed to him in the fulfillment of a commandment, and an entire lifetime may be needed to carry out just one commandment properly.⁶ In Hasidic terms such a "proper" fulfillment is a charisma, an act of grace; indeed, the *Hasid* is described in Jewish tradition as a charismatic figure.⁷ He is clearly distinguished from the sober, balanced figure of the *Tsaddik*, who acts in accordance with the strict letter of the Law, giving each person his due. This extremism, which is never in equilibrium, contains an anarchistic element. There is something deeply "non-bourgeois" in the *Hasid's* way of life; the stories told in the Talmud about such Hasidim nearly always have something absurd about them, and are sometimes repellent to the ordinary, bourgeois mentality.⁸ In order to obey a commandment, such as that of charity, the *Hasid* may ruin himself, and even sell his own wife

into slavery. In brief, nothing prevents him from following his path to its end. Sooner or later, his deeds are bound to conflict with the demands of society—a conflict that never surfaces for the righteous person.

The righteous person, who seeks to meet the demands of the Torah, is caught in a never-ending struggle with his Evil Urge, which rebels against these demands; he must constantly wage battle with his own nature.⁹ But even this struggle between the Good Urge and the Evil Urge, in which he emerges as the “hero who conquers his own drive,” never goes beyond the demands placed upon every human being. Even though the struggle with the Evil Urge generally includes the righteous man’s resistance to sexual temptation, such resistance does not play a crucial part in the rabbinic definition of the *Tsaddik*. Joseph, the prototype of such steadfastness, is often referred to by the title “Joseph the Righteous” (*Yosef ha-Tsaddik*), but this epithet is likewise applied to many other biblical characters, in whose lives such sexual trials were not a factor.¹⁰

I have prefaced my discussion with these remarks because of their importance for understanding the development of this concept in Jewish mysticism. In the final part of this presentation, I will attempt to show how the image of the *Tsaddik* was profoundly transformed under the influence of new, mystical definitions, acquiring features that were far removed from the original notion. It is nevertheless possible to discern a certain continuity of development, in which the charismatic traits of the later *Tsaddik* in large part derive from the tradition of the *Hasid* in the Talmud.

But before focusing upon this development, we must make some comments about the use of *Tsaddik* as an attribute or name of God in talmudic literature. Biblical statements about the righteous man or *Tsaddik* are here also applied to God; He is the truly righteous, and is frequently referred to as “the Righteous One of the World” (*Tsaddiko shel ‘Olam*) or “the Righteous, Life of the Universe” (*Tsaddik Hai ‘Olamim*).¹¹ Why is God the Righteous One? The reason given for this epithet is entirely different from that found later in Jewish mysticism: “Because You test the heart and kidneys [i.e., He is able to penetrate into the innermost recesses of the heart by dint of His omniscience], we know that You are a righteous God.”¹² Hence, God is righteous by virtue of His penetrating knowledge,

which humans lack by their very nature. It is nevertheless worthy of note that the rabbinic tradition speaks about the earthly righteous man far more than it does about God with this term; among the names and attributes of God, *Tsaddik* is used relatively infrequently.

II

How did the notion of the *Tsaddik* change in Jewish mysticism? Surprisingly enough, the legal element of judgment or law was eliminated from this concept. The Righteous One is no longer the righteous judge; in the Kabbalah, God as Judge constitutes an entirely different aspect from that of God as the Righteous One; they reflect two different sides of the Godhead.¹³ The newness of this concept is most evident when the Kabbalists discuss not the earthly righteous but the *Tsaddik* as a symbol of an aspect of God; it is a particular one of the ten *Sefiroth*, generally the next to last. For the Kabbalists the *Sefiroth* are—to put it succinctly—identified with the totality of the manifest or the active Godhead; they express the fullness of His omnipotence and all the aspects of His divine nature. Each of these potencies appears in a wealth of symbolic representations, but as different as they may be, the most important symbols of each individual *Sefirah* are inherently interconnected. The symbols in which God appears as the *Tsaddik* are thus vastly illuminating for our problem and deserving of close analysis. The writings of the earliest Kabbalists, in particular, from *Sefer ha-Bahir* to the *Zohar*, shed much light on this topic. The hypostatization of the notion of the earthly righteous man into a symbol of the corresponding *Sefirah* introduced several of his characteristics into the symbolism of this *Sefirah*, which in turn influenced the understanding of its earthly representative. In the Kabbalah the *Tsaddik* is first and foremost a mystical symbol, deriving from many different sources; he is also the image of the perfect human being, an image determined and fashioned by this symbolism. Molded in this way by Kabbalistic Musar (ethical-homiletical) literature, the *Tsaddik* is a constitutive and decisive element in the Hasidic movement.

Sefer ha-Bahir, which undoubtedly incorporates notions and traditions that predate the twelfth century, contains many formulations that presuppose the doctrine of *Sefiroth*. We find here the oldest form of this symbolism, in which cosmological, moral, and other biblical conceptions are employed to describe the ten divine “words” or logoi—God’s aeons and mystical attributes.¹⁴ We likewise find here the earliest list of these ten potencies, which introduces us to the motifs that were linked by the earliest Kabbalists to the concept of the *Sefiroth*.¹⁵

I have already stated that the image of the *Tsaddik* as a mystical symbol is connected to the penultimate *Sefirah*; this indeed does hold true for the classical depictions of the Sefirotic tree. However, in *Sefer ha-Bahir* and some of the earlier texts of the Spanish Kabbalah influenced by it, *Tsaddik* assumes the position of the seventh *Sefirah*; in this tradition, the *Sefiroth* of *Netsah* and *Hod* follow the seventh *Sefirah* instead of preceding it.¹⁶ The reason for this is doubtless the fact that these older schema knew nothing of the sexual symbolism of these *Sefiroth*, which (e.g., in numerous places in the *Zohar*) correspond to the male testicles, from which the seed flows. In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, these *Sefiroth* merely represent the two legs. However, the location of *Tsaddik* as the seventh *Sefirah* explains certain important symbolic elements that appear in this connection in the *Bahir*.

There are five sections in *Sefer ha-Bahir* that deal in particular with the symbolism of the seventh *Sefirah* (S §39, M §§57–58; S §71, M §102; S §§104–105, M §§155–159; S §114, M §168; S §§123–126, M §§180–184), and it is also implicit in a number of other statements. The seventh logos is defined here as the mystical East, standing opposite the *Shekhinah*, which is the West:

The seventh is the east of the World, from whence comes the seed of Israel, for the spinal column draws down from the brain of the person and goes to the *membrum virile*, and from thence comes the seed, as is said, “I will bring your seed from the east” (Isa. 43:5). . . . And why is it written, “and gather you from the west” (ibid.)? From that attribute which always tends toward the west. And why is it called west? Because there all the seed blends [*mit‘arev*; a pun on

ma'arav, west]. . . . This teaches that he brings from the east and sows in the west, and thereafter [that is, in the time of the Redemption] he gathers what he has sown.¹⁷

Surprisingly, no mention is made here of a “sacred marriage” between these two *Sefiroth*, despite the rather obvious symbolism of this notion.¹⁸

Further on we encounter an extremely bizarre passage (S §105; M §157), which seems to talk about the eighth logos, but immediately identifies it with the previous one, the seventh; this identification matches precisely the corresponding symbols in the other passages in the *Bahir*. We read:

What is the eighth? The Holy One, blessed be He, has one righteous man in His world, and he is very precious to Him, because he maintains the whole world and he is its foundation. He [God] provides for him and lets him grow and cultivates him and guards him. He is loved and treasured above, loved and treasured below; feared and sublime above, feared and sublime below; comely and accepted above, comely and accepted below; and he is the foundation of all souls. You say that he is the eighth [logos] and that he is the foundation of all souls? Is it not written, “And on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested”¹⁹ (Exod. 31:17)? Yes, he is indeed the seventh [logos], for he conciliates between them, for those six [subdivide] into three below and three above, and he conciliates between them. And why is he known as the seventh? Did he only come into existence on the seventh [day]? No! But because the Holy One, blessed be He, rested on the Sabbath, it is said of that aspect, “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested” (ibid.).²⁰

The *Tsaddik* is thus portrayed as an aeon in God’s world—that is, within the Sefirotic world—and as a cosmic potency; he is both the foundation of the world and the foundation of all souls. He is also the Sabbath, the seventh “primal day,” mediating among the other six days, which correspond to the six preceding *Sefiroth*, among whom there is a certain inner tension. A talmudic dictum concerning the earthly righ-

teous man states (*Hagigah* 12b): "The world rests upon one column, whose name is the Righteous One, as is written (Prov. 10:26): 'the righteous is the foundation of the world [literally, "everlasting foundation"]'." The *Tsaddik* is thus conceived as a cosmic potency, supporting and maintaining the world both above and below. The connection with this talmudic motif is expressly emphasized in another *Bahir* passage (S §71; M §102):

A column goes from the earth to the heaven, and its name is *Tsaddik*, after the [earthly] righteous. And if there are righteous men on earth, then it [the column] grows strong, but if not, it grows weak; and it bears the entire world, as is written: "the righteous is the foundation of the world." But if [the column] is weak, then the world cannot survive. Hence, even if there be only one righteous man in the entire world, he sustains the world (after *Yoma* 38b).

The symbol of the column in this passage corresponds to the Tree of Life, growing from earth to heaven which, as we shall see below, becomes the cosmic tree for the authors of the *Bahir*. The symbolism of the column may likewise include an element of phallic symbolism.

As the foundation of the world, *Tsaddik* constitutes the harmonious conciliation of all the potencies located above it; the symbol of the Sabbath provides a link between the themes of conciliation and repose, in which "all effects are fulfilled" (S §105; M §157), and that of the source or foundation of all souls. From this mystical Sabbath, which is identified with the cosmic column that sustains the world, "all souls fly out" (S §39; M §58). This image of flying souls brings us back to the motif of the cosmic tree, from which the souls fly out as birds or on which, in a different symbolism, they are the fruits of the tree.²¹ The *Tsaddik* thus appears as the foundation of all the souls of the world; all individual souls emerge from this "treasury of souls." This motif seems as well to involve notions about the Soul of the World; in fact, we find symbols related to this idea in another section of *Sefer ha-Bahir* (S §§123–126; M §§180–184). We previously encountered the *Tsaddik* as the mystical East; here (S

§123; M §180), drawing upon a different tradition, he is specifically identified as the Southwest.²²

That potency of the Southwest is the foundation of the world, as is written, “the righteous is the foundation of the worlds.” A second [potency] stands behind the [divine] chariot, and a first potency before it, while the Righteous One who is the foundation of the world is in the middle [i.e., between *Netsah* and *Hod*], and it emerges from the South of the world [i.e., apparently, the direction of *Hesed*, God’s grace], and he is the prince [i.e., ruler] of both. And in his hand he holds the souls of all living things, for he is the Life of the World, and every term of Creation spoken about [in Scripture] takes place through him. And of him it is written: “and he ceased from work and rested” (Exod. 31:17), for he is the principle of the Sabbath.

The term *Hai ‘Olamim*, “the Eternally Living One,” based upon Daniel 12:7, appears in the Talmud as one of the names of God, and is used likewise by the old *Merkavah* mystics in their hymns.²³ In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the term shifts its meaning to “the Life of the Universe.” We find here for the first time the symbolism of life—a symbolism that from then on remained associated with the figure of the *Tsaddik*; life is connected with the master of souls. This source, from which all souls come, is also the primal ground from which the life of all worlds derives. This “life” is the mediator by which God’s strength operates in all things, for which reason this foundation is repeatedly designated in *Sefer ha-Bahir* as “All” or “the All” (*kol* or *ha-kol*): “We bless the Holy One, blessed be He, who fills the Life of the Worlds with His Wisdom, and gives all . . . and in His hand is the treasure house of all souls” (S §§125–126; M §§183–184). Just as the earthly righteous man strives to fulfill the divine commandments and virtually embodies in his own body the commandments that he observes, so the mystical site of all the commandments is to be found in the supernatural *Tsaddik*, the Life of the Worlds.²⁴

This *Sefirah*, which mediates and harmonizes all the other forces, is also the “channel” by which all the brooks and rivers of the upper *Sefiroth*

pour into the sea of the *Shekhinah*.²⁵ What is still absent here is the phallic symbolism that was later connected with this theme. To be sure, the statement in S §71 (M §102) concerning the column which “strengthens and slackens” would seem to suggest such a phallic interpretation, but in a different passage—which clearly seems to have once been a continuation of the above-quoted S §105 (M §157)—this motif appears quite explicitly:

And why is it called the eighth? Because the eight begin in it, and in it is completed the counting of the eight; but in its action it is seven. And in what way do the eight begin in it? The eight days of circumcision. . . . And what is the reason for the eight? Because there are eight extremities in man. And what are they? The right and left hand, the right and left foot, the head and the torso, the [organ of] circumcision which mediates, and his wife who is like his body; as it is written, “and he shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). These are eight. [*Bahir*, S §114; M §168]

Despite the fact that no explicit mention is made here as to which *Sefirah* corresponds to which part of the human body, it seems quite clear that the seventh is the sign of the covenant, i.e., the phallus, while opposite it is the female element, which is the eighth.²⁶ This may allude to an early notion, in which the male and female constituted the seventh and eighth *Sefiroth*, rather than the ninth and tenth as in the later, more thoroughly formulated systems, as well as in some passages in the *Bahir*. The metaphor of the phallus as a mediator in the center of the human body originates in *Sefer ha-Yetsirah* (I, 3; II, 1). As the source of mediation is always connected in the *Bahir* with the symbolism of the *Tsaddik*, we are entitled to assume the same here; indeed, the entire drift of this passage justifies such a conclusion. We therefore have important clues here for the understanding of the *Tsaddik* as a mystical symbol, connected to the center of life as well as to other realms. These metaphors were developed and strengthened in subsequent stages of the Kabbalah.

To conclude this discussion of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, I would like to return to

the symbol of the cosmic tree, which appears in a passage of archaic, mythical character (S §14; M §22):

It was I who planted this tree, so that all the world could delight in it, and I engraved all within it, and called its name “the All”; for all hangs from it and all comes from it and all need it, and all look upon it and set their hopes upon it, and from thence all souls emanate.

This tree is never mentioned before, but suddenly appears in a mythical reading of Isaiah 44:24: “I am the Lord that maketh all; that stretched forth heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by Myself.” It is obvious that everything said about the symbolism of this tree fits neatly with the cosmic column representing the righteous and the foundation of the world. We have already mentioned the understanding of this *Sefirah* as the All, from which everything emanates because everything has its foundation within it, as well as being the source from which souls derive. The tree is planted and rooted in the soil of the Divine, and both delight in one another, as stated further on in this passage. If we may assume that this applies to the *Sefiroth* of *Tsaddik* and *Shekhinah*, which is found in the symbolism of the *Bahir* as “God’s earth,” then we may see in this mutual delight the first allusion to the later Kabbalistic symbolism of a sacred union between these two *Sefiroth*.

What we read about the aeon of “All” in this indubitably Jewish-Gnostic fragment seems to me to bear a striking resemblance to one of the enigmatic passages in the Slavonic Book of Enoch. This previously unnoticed connection seems to me to be quite important and significant, and may reflect a common source in a very ancient Orthodox Jewish-Gnostic tradition. The Slavonic Book of Enoch was probably written by a first-century Jewish author, either in Egypt or the Land of Israel.²⁷ In two places (chaps. 11 and 17), he speaks about a primordial “great aeon,” bearing the thus far inexplicable name of *Adoil*:²⁸

For before all things were visible, I alone used to go about the invisible things, like the sun from east to west and from west to

east. . . . And I conceived the thought of placing foundations and of creating visible creation. I commanded in the very lowest parts, that visible things should come down from invisible [i.e., the chaos], and *Adoil* came down, very great, and I beheld him, and lo! he had a belly of great light. And I said to him: "Become undone, *Adoil*, and let the visible come out of thee." And he came undone, and a great light came out. And I was in the midst of the great light, and there is born light. And from light, there came forth a great age, and showed all creation which I had thought to create. And I saw that it was good. And I placed for myself a throne, and took my seat on it, and said to the light: "Go thou up higher and fix thyself high above the throne, and be a foundation to the highest things."²⁹

Without specifically mentioning the name *Adoil*, the second passage has a new and more precise wording: prior to the Creation, God established the "World of Creation (*aeon*)" as the foundation of all created things. This "aeon" is the primordial time of Creation, which does not divide into fixed units of time—years, months, hours, etc.—until much later. This idea is quite similar to the *Bahir's* notion of the primal Days of Creation, which are synonymous with the *Sefiroth*. This primordial time will return in the eschaton, and will forever remain indivisible.

When all creation visible and invisible, as the Lord created it, shall end, then every man goes to the great judgment, and then all time shall perish, and the years, and thenceforward there will be neither months nor days nor hours, they will be stuck together and will not be counted.

There will be one aeon, and the righteous who shall escape the Lord's great judgment, shall be collected in the great aeon, for the righteous the great aeon will begin, and they will live eternally.³⁰

Similarly, in the *Bahir* we saw the All upon which the entire Creation depends: All come from it . . . and all look upon it and set their hopes upon it (eschatologically). The righteous unite with this aeon and it unites with them—an inverted formula of the type that is highly popular both in Christian and Jewish-Gnostic literature. One might say that the

righteous unite with that *Sefirah* which constitutes their own primordial image. As in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, this chapter of the Slavonic Book of Enoch explains that God did not even reveal to His angels the secret of how He created being out of nonbeing—i.e., the secret of the formation of the Great Aeon, the instrument for all creation. The relation between these two images strikes me as demanding particular attention: just as the righteous, in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, originate in this aeon, so are they able, in the Slavonic Book of Enoch, to ultimately reunite with their source. One may even ask whether the name *Adoil* might not be a corruption, via a long development to the Slavonic, of *Tsaddok-el*, God's righteous: to wit, [Ts]addo[k]el.

The remarks of the Slavonic Book of Enoch concerning this aeon that "carries all Creation" may shed light on a curious utterance of the *Bahir* (S §123; M §180), according to which all Creation takes place through the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik*: "And every language of Creation is performed through it." These words do not square at all with the Kabbalah's other theses about Creation; as we shall see, the writings of the early Kabbalists ascribe to the *Tsaddik* the function of sustaining the worlds, but not that of Creation. This latter function originates in a higher *Sefirah*—i.e., in the transition from the first (*ayin*) to the second *Sefirah* (*Hokhmah*, the divine wisdom), which correspond to nonbeing and being.³¹ In this older tradition of the *Bahir*, the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik Yesod 'Olam* is apparently perceived as a medium by which the Creation was activated, albeit not the Demiurge itself (which in Gnosticism bears a certain pejorative sense, as the God of Justice). In several later Kabbalistic traditions, the notion of the Righteous One as the First Created Being is linked to the aggadic motif of the primordial light created on the first day of Creation, which was thereafter hidden away for the righteous in the future aeon because it was too good for this world (*Hagigah* 12a). This talmudic image is certainly reflected in chapter 11 of the Slavonic Book of Enoch. In *Midrash ha-Ne 'elam*, a relatively early section of the *Zohar*, we read:

The Holy One, blessed be He, saw and considered that the world cannot exist without the Foundation. And what is the Foundation upon which the world rests? The righteous, as it is said, "The righ-

teous is the foundation of the world.” And this is the primordial foundation which the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world, that is called “light,” as is written, “Light is sown for the righteous” (Ps. 97:11).³²

The hypostasis of the Righteous One as one of the cosmic aeons involved in the beginnings of Creation may very well be older than the specific medieval form in which this Kabbalistic speculation has come down to us, a point supported by the above analysis. Jewish Gnostics of a monotheistic tendency seem to have specifically emphasized the symbol of the *Tsaddik* as a supernal aeon and a creative potency operative throughout the cosmos. This emphasis may well have had some polemical point against the dualistic Gnostic depreciation of the Creator as the God of Justice alone. The more scornfully the Gnostics spoke of the God of Justice, the more powerfully and exuberantly the positive character of this title of God was underscored in the earliest forms of Jewish Gnosticism, fragments of which came down to the early Kabbalists.

III

In thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalah, the ideas found in the older fragments of *Sefer ha-Bahir* were developed into an elaborated schema. Here, the divine Sefirotic world and the concrete world of creation deriving from it were more and more firmly connected through symbolism. The more the Kabbalists meditated upon this world of *Sefiroth*, the richer and more detailed each particular *Sefirah* became. First and foremost, of course, the biblical text provided an inexhaustible treasury of images and metaphors for the symbols of the *Sefiroth*. It was the unique achievement of this Kabbalistic gnosis to select and arrange these symbols, each one of which was opened for contemplation of its endlessly rich aspects. The esoteric exegesis and primal spiritual images of the Divine and of the Creator, which resurface repeatedly in the consciousness of these Kabbalists, combine in the extant works of Kabbalistic theology. Sometimes it is easy to identify what derives from the Kabbalists' intuition and seeks

justification in a biblical verse as a kind of afterthought, and what is authentic exegesis, albeit rooted in a basic mystical stance. Often enough, however, these two elements merge into a new totality, in which the role played by either factor can no longer be determined. The most important crystallizations of Kabbalistic symbolism indicate that these are no arbitrary combinations of diverse ideas; rather, a profound and highly significant bond exists between the basic symbols of each individual *Sefirah*. The Kabbalists are guided by an inner law, which allows them to see these and no other context for a given symbol. At times, a particular symbol may fluctuate or be applied to several different spheres. This should come as no surprise, given the infinitely varied and fluid nature of the *Sefiroth* concept, but even here the fundamental unity of the basic themes is always discernible. We find examples of such differences in the detailed working out of symbolism in the writings of the Kabbalists of Gerona, in those of Joseph Gikatilla, and in those of R. Moses de Leon (both in the Hebrew texts published under his own name and in his pseudonymous Aramaic-language *Zohar*).

None of these works is so illuminating for understanding the nature of the symbolism of each individual *Sefirah* as Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei Orah* (The Gates of Light), written around 1290. The author subsequently treated the same theme in a shorter work, *Sha'arei Tsedek*.³³ In these two works Gikatilla offers a detailed presentation of each of the ten *Sefiroth*, using numerous quotations and interpretations of biblical passages, each one of the *Sefiroth* appearing under the aegis of one of God's names. As already mentioned above, the *Sefirah* which appears as the seventh in *Sefer ha-Bahir* assumes the ninth position in these classical systems; hence, Gikatilla, proceeding upward from the *Shekhinah*, the most revealed aspect of the Godhead, to its more concealed strata, treats this ninth *Sefirah* in the second chapter of his book. Several basic themes of his symbolism are important for our discussion.

The *Tsaddik* is understood in Gikatilla's discussion, first and foremost, as a mystical symbol of the Lord of Life. The essence of this *Sefirah* is symbolized by the divine name *El Hai*, "the living God" (cf. Josh. 3:10; Hos. 2:1; Ps. 84:3):

It is called the Living God because it is at the end of the nine levels, which are called nine mirrors [in which the Deity is reflected]. And He draws the attribute of grace and love from all the *Sefiroth* into [the last *Sefirah*, which is under] the attribute of the name *Adonai* [Lord].

The life that flows from the higher *Sefiroth* is “gathered” into this realm; the positive life force is channeled via this last, passively receptive *Sefirah*, into all the creatures of the world, from the angels down to the earthly beings. This *Sefirah* is the source of the souls of all living things, each with their respective inherent nature (such was the reading of Gen. 1:24), even the soul of the Messiah and the souls of the angels. According to Gikatilla (unlike the philosophers, who view the angels as pure form), even the angels consist of both soul and—albeit extremely subtle—matter:

All of the souls, above and below, are drawn down from the name *Adonai*, which is called “the Land of Life” (a symbol common to both of the last *Sefiroth*), by means of the potency of *El Hai*, which channels the vital force by the name *Adonai* from the Source of Life through the medium of the Tree of Life. . . . And it was for this that King David was longing and yearning when he said (Ps. 42:3), “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.”³⁴

The symbols of the Source of Life and the Tree of Life (which ordinarily correspond to *Binah* and *Tif'ereth*) are applied, both by Gikatilla and the *Zohar*, to the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik*. The tenth *Sefirah*, *Shekhinah* (which Gikatilla generally prefers to designate as *Adonai*), is the pool into which life flows, from which it then disperses to all the lower beings according to their natures and needs. However, the infinite fertility of living things is rooted in the ninth *Sefirah*. Gikatilla knows of two “primal sources of living water”: one in the highest *Sefirah*, in the Source called *'Ein-Sof*, the concealed Godhead itself; and the other here, in the realm of *Tsaddik*. But that which flows freely and unhampered from the highest source is sub-

jected here to certain predetermined laws and limits, depending upon how capable and worthy the creatures are of receiving its flow. The created world only receives the stream of life within the limits of the divine law governing all things; that is why this *Sefirah* bears the biblical name of God, *Shaddai*, which is explained, in terms of a talmudic exegesis, as the potency that sets limits for Creation with the call "Enough!" (*Dai!*). The long mystical journey of the Kabbalists to the Source of Life follows this symbolic path:

He who seeks true life before God will have his place shown him by these waters. And when man walks along the bank of this river and does not depart from its banks, he will be shown the place from which it flows and taken to the source from which the waters come. And the sign of this is: "from Mattanah to Nahaliel; and from Nahaliel to Bamoth (Num. 28:8)." ³⁵

The vitality concentrated in *El Hai* is the foundation that supports the orderly house of Creation, and is synonymous with *Tsaddik Yesod 'Olam*, the Righteous One upon whom the world rests. The symbolism of *Sefer ha-Bahir* clearly merges here with that of classical Kabbalah. But this mystical *Tsaddik* is the foundation of a house that is built, not from the ground up, but from the roof down; and Gikatilla explains, the foundation of the world operates like a magnet: "Does one not see that a lodestone pulls [things] to itself while it is above, and that which it lifts is below." Hence, this *Sefirah* is the true symbol of peace; it sustains the harmonious equilibrium of upper and lower, and regulates the disturbances that interfere with this harmony. Just as the earthly righteous "corrects" the flaw in things and establishes peace and harmony in the world by means of his actions, so is the cosmic function of the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik*:

As the *Tsaddik* awakens the world to repent or to fix that which is not whole, this attribute is called Peace, mediating for good between *YHVH* and *Adonai*, making peace between them and bringing them near to dwell together without separation or breaking up in the world; and at that hour we find that God is one.³⁶

Likewise, in *Sha'arei Tsedek*, he writes:

Know that for this reason the righteous are called righteous (*Tsaddikim*): because they set all the inner things in their place within, and all outer things in their place without, and nothing leaves the boundary set for it. And that is why they are known as the righteous.³⁷

We find here the first major definition of the new understanding of the ideal figure of the *Tsaddik*, as it was later formulated in Kabbalistic ethical literature: the righteous man is he who sets everything in the world in its proper place. But the simplicity of this definition should not deceive us as to its messianic significance and utopian explosiveness. A world in which everything is in its proper place would be, in Jewish terms, a redeemed world. The dialectics of the *Tsaddik* thus flow into and merge with the dialectics of the messianic; if there is peace and harmony in the divine world, “so that God is truly one at that moment,” this oneness would also be manifested undisguised in our world.³⁸

As in *Bahir*, Gikatilla also develops the symbolism of the Sabbath as the principle of resting harmony within the dynamics of the Sefirotic system.³⁹ One is tempted to say that the famous Hegelian definition of the nervous system as “the repose of the organic within its movement”⁴⁰ is no less appropriate to the Kabbalistic symbol of the Sabbath. The *Tsaddik* is also the Law, by which all things receive the influx due to them, by which they exist. The statements in *Sefer ha-Bahir* about the commandments found in the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik* are transferred by Gikatilla to the realm of the *hukkim*: statutes, i.e., those laws of the Torah for which there is no rational explanation—such as the proscription against mixing species when sowing and in garments, the use of the ashes of a red heifer to purify persons contaminated by contact with the dead, etc.—which, according to the Kabbalists, can only be grasped in terms of the hidden meaning of the entire cosmos. The effusion of life-vitality of the *Tsaddik* is thus confined by the limits of the Law to activity within the sacred boundaries.⁴¹ Again, as in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, this *Sefirah* is known as “the All,” albeit in Gikatilla this term refers to the totality of things maintaining

themselves within their own laws and limits. The abundance of life, which seeks to flow as freely moving creative power, is limited and structured by the Law.

We now come to the problem of the sexual symbolism which, throughout the Kabbalah, is inseparable from the image of the *Tsaddik*. In terms of the mirroring of the structure of the 'Adam Kadmon in the human body, the ninth *Sefirah* not only corresponds to the phallus; it is also, by reason of this allocation, the site of the circumcision, the sign of the Covenant. The vital force concentrated here is externally expressed in the world of creatures as sexual energy; however, the unrestrained power of the procreative drive, as the creative element in the cosmos, is harnessed and restricted within sacred boundaries. The *Tsaddik* is the one who guards and keeps it within these boundaries; he chains this drive, which flows from the river of life, within the limits of the Law, thus maintaining its sacred nature. Hence, this *Sefirah* in particular was linked to "Joseph the Righteous," who in *Gikatilla*, and especially in the *Zohar*, represents the ninth *Sefirah* of *Yesod*. Bold sexual symbolism plays a dominant role in many passages of the latter that speak of the divine attribute of *Tsaddik*.⁴² The *Zohar* sees the Tree of Life itself as the phallus, while the "Life of the World" (*Hai 'Olamim*) is the procreative power of the righteous man, in which the vital power of the divine organism is concentrated and intensified.⁴³ While the sixth *Sefirah*, *Tif'ereth*, represents maleness as an active principle in a general way, in the ninth *Sefirah* this maleness is emphatically transposed into procreative power. Under the impact of this notion, a whole series of concepts that had previously been linked to *Binah* or to *Tif'ereth* were now transposed to the ninth *Sefirah*. The stream of emanation flows from all the higher *Sefiroth* into this sphere, where it becomes the procreative force. Hence, the river of life, flowing from this *Sefirah* into the female element, the *Shekhinah*, thereby bringing blessing and harmony to the lower worlds, is frequently described in images of sexual union, which were particularly favored by the author of the *Zohar*. Images in which this *Sefirah* is seen as concentrating the stream of emanation, such as "the Source of Life," "the Source of the River," frequently occur in this context; in *Sefer ha-Zohar*, as in the *Bahir*, this *Sefirah* is the "Life of the Worlds." But it is also called *Musaf* ("excess"

or “added” element): that is, the constantly strengthening flow of light, the “one place” to which all “the water which is under the heavens” (the heavens being a symbol for the male power in general, i.e., *Tifereth*) flows—that is, in which all the potencies acting within the World of Emanation are gathered.

But even when such erotic mysticism takes on a more spiritualized form, it nevertheless exhibits traits of its original form. This is shown, for example, in the *Zohar*’s interpretation of Genesis 1:5, which begins with a reading of the verse that is at once literal and mystical:

“And God called. . . .” What does “and He called” mean? He called and summoned the perfect light, which stands in the center, to produce a light, which is the foundation (*Yesod*) of the world, and upon which worlds rest. And from that perfect light, the central pillar, there was drawn forth, from the right side, *Yesod*, the life of the worlds, which is “day.”

“And the darkness He called ‘night’”—He called and summoned that from the side of darkness there should be produced a female, the moon, which rules by night and is called “night,” the mystery of *Adonai*, “Lord (*Adon*) of all the earth” (Joshua 3:11).

The right entered the perfect pillar that is in the center, which comprises the mystery of the left, and ascended aloft to the primal point, and it took and seized hold of the power of the three vowel-points: *holem*, *shurek*, *hirek*, which are the holy seed—for there is no seed sown except through this mystery—and all was joined together through the central pillar, and it produced the foundation (*Yesod*) of the world, and it is, therefore, called “all” (*Kol*), for it holds all through the light of desire. The left flamed strongly and exuded odor. Throughout all levels it exuded odor, and from the fiery flame it produced the female, the moon; and this flame was darkened, because it came from darkness. And these two sides produced these two levels, one male and one female.

Yesod took hold of the central pillar through the additional light that it contains, for when this central pillar was perfected, and it made perfect peace throughout the extremities, an additional amount of light was immediately accorded it from above, and from

all the extremities in an all-inclusive joy, and from this addition of joy the foundation of the worlds emerged, and it was called *Musaf* (addition). All the hosts emerged from here into the realms below, and holy spirits, and souls, through the mystery of *YHVH Tseva'oth*, *Elohei ha-ruḥoth* ("God, the God of the spirits"—Num. 16:22).⁴⁴

It is no coincidence that this potency of *Yesod* is referred to in the *Zohar* by the term *or ha-teshukah* ("the light of desire")—the same term as is used for the desire of the male for the female.⁴⁵ Thus, the sacred marriage of male and female potencies, consummated by means of the *Tsaddik*, the *Sefirah* of *Yesod*, lies at the very center of this symbolism.⁴⁶ The ancient problem of the tension between the Creator God and the Procreator God, reemerges here quite naturally at the center of Kabbalistic theosophy, namely, in the symbolism of the *Tsaddik*. In contrast with the gods of myth, the biblical God is often described as being creative, yet not engaging in any sexual activity—precisely what the *Tsaddik* of the Kabbalah exhibits in His union with the *Shekhinah*.

This brings us to a further crucial point. The Kabbalistic texts constantly use the term *shefa'* (literally, "overflow") whenever discussing this *Sefirah* or attempting to describe it in images and symbols. The term is used in two different senses: in that of an overflowing stream, and in that of active inflow or influx. This influx flows from the *Tsaddik* into the *Shekhinah*, and from thence into all the worlds. The Kabbalists are fond of such usages as *shefa' ha-berakhah* (abundance of blessing) and similar phrases that suggest the giving nature of the divine fullness. Such phrases are associated with the sexual nuance of "inflow." Nevertheless, the term requires closer definition. R. Asher ben David, nephew of R. Isaac the Blind (ca. 1235) already conceived of this wealth of blessing as a creative act independent of the act of Creation itself:

Because there is nothing new under the sun, only the abundance of blessing which come from the Source of Life and from the Spring which blesses all things, every day and every hour and at every time, in order to establish and sustain them in the proper way. . . . And this is what is said in the liturgy: "In His goodness he renews every

day the Works of Creation.” “His goodness” refers to the drawing down of blessing, which is the attribute of His goodness which ceaselessly comes from *’Ein-Sof* to sustain the works of Creation, for were it to cease for an hour or even a moment, it could not exist.⁴⁷

The *shefa*⁶ entering the world through the Source of Life sustains the world, but did not in itself bring about the Creation.

This view is clearly expressed by Gikatilla who, in his lengthy discussions of the functioning of the ninth *Sefirah*, never speaks of any creative function, but emphasizes its sustaining function. Creation itself is rooted in a deeper level of the Godhead, in the transition from the first to the second *Sefirah* through which divine nonbeing is transformed into divine being. All created things came into being and continue to exist by means of the externalizing of the innermost realms. However, there is a certain unmistakable dichotomy here among the Kabbalists. On the one hand, the transition from nonbeing to being that takes place in the highest *Sefirah* is the decisive step; on the other hand, Creation as such is only revealed upon the completion of the entire structure of all ten *Sefiroth*. This latter event may be simultaneous with the completion of this structure, as its external expression, or it may come about thereafter, as a further structure completing the inner structure of the *Sefiroth* and reflecting it. In any event, the preservation of Creation is rooted in a different process than its genesis. This process of continuous awakening arouses the passive creature to a state of active, vital life; it is this very process that is connoted by the *shefa*⁶, which flows into all created beings from the ninth and tenth *Sefiroth*, and especially from their union. Gikatilla always takes pains to distinguish between the two above-mentioned aspects, and nowhere as clearly as in his chapter on the symbolism of the ninth *Sefirah*.

Franz Josef Molitor perceived this in his brilliant 1834 essay “On a Speculative Development of the Basic Universal Concepts of Theosophy according to the Principles of the Kabbalah.”⁴⁸ He writes:

As none of the creatures, neither the individual ones nor the objective natural elements, have the ability to arouse themselves or to

exert an animating effect on one another, they would have remained purely ineffective potencies if the Godhead had not, after creating them, awoken them to physical and mental life by dint of a special inflow. This influx is distinct from the act of Creation, but it continues as steadily as creation itself. Hence, the Godhead is not only He who constantly produces and renews, but also the eternal Animator, Mover, and Guide of the world. For were this enlivening inflow to be interrupted for even a moment, the beings, although not ceasing to exist, would sink back into the state of their original potentiality and passivity and thus lose the power to spontaneously act upon and mutually arouse one another. . . . But since the creatures are not dead machines, but living creatures made in the image of the living Godhead, they are able, by means of their own actions only, by conducting themselves in internal regularity and harmonious agreement with the Godhead, to arouse the divine love to be known in their own lives, and in such a manner to partake of the life of the infinite primal image in whose likeness they are made.

We find here an explanation of the Kabbalistic symbolism of *Tsaddik* as that which brings about true harmony within all of existence. This definition derives directly from the meaning of the Jewish symbol. The way of the Righteous One, according to this symbolism of giving and sustaining life, consists in the establishment of harmony or peace—concepts that overlap in the Hebrew word *shalom*. Strictly speaking, *shalom* represents a state of completeness or integrity, and it is only in these terms that it also refers to peace.

Molitor's remarks likewise incorporate the Kabbalistic principle that awakening and influx from above presuppose awakening down below, a thesis repeatedly emphasized in the *Zohar*. The higher attempts to sustain the lower, in which it recognizes itself; it is drawn to the lower, wishing to unite with it and channel their influx into it, because the life and harmony of the creation are based upon the life and harmony of the Creator. But this influx presupposes the receptivity of the created being, and can only perform the "arousal from above" where the creaturely "arouses itself from below." In this way the lower world can transform

the influx from above into a living, active structure, and thereafter to return it as the reflection of its own existence. Such is the dialectical relationship of mutuality and magical rapport existing, in the Kabbalistic view, between the active Godhead and all created things.⁴⁹ But the quintessential symbol of this rapport is the union of *Tsaddik* and *Shekhinah*, based upon the arousal of procreativity in sexual union between male and female.

Portrayals of this symbolism of the sacred marriage and its inherent dynamics have always aroused vehement and understandable protest from the opponents of the Kabbalists. Eliezer Zvi Zweifel, who compiled an enormous quantity of such passages from later Kabbalistic and Hasidic literature in his magnum opus on Hasidism,⁵⁰ complains about the sexual metaphors and descriptions of God and the *Sefiroth* with the words “They make the reader’s hair stand on end.”⁵¹ Indeed, these quotations are prefaced with a sigh: “Woe to me if I copy it; woe to me if I do not copy it.” Yet it is precisely this attempt to deal with the profundities of the sexual sphere inherent in this symbolism that renders the Kabbalistic treatment of it so serious.⁵² Indeed, such symbolism harkens all the way back to rabbinic literature itself—namely, to an important talmudic passage (*Yoma* 54a–b) which was quite appropriately chosen by Jiri Langer as the epigraph of his book, *Die Erotik der Kabbala*:

Rab Katina said: When the Israelites entered the Temple in Jerusalem [during the three pilgrimage festivals], the curtain [to the Holy of Holies] was opened and they were shown the cherubim in intimate embraces, and they were told: Behold, the love between yourselves and God is like the love between man and woman. . . . Resh Lakish said: When the Gentiles conquered the Temple, they saw the cherubim in intimate embraces. They hauled them out into the marketplace and said: “Behold! Israel, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse, concerns itself with such things?! Then they reviled them, as is said, “All that honored her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness” [Lam. 1:8].

It is quite clear that there was a willingness to accept the mythical image of the *hieros gamos*, the sacred marriage; without this it is obvious that this

sphere could never have been brought within the purview of the Kabbalah. The fact that this was brought within the rubric of the specifically moral category of the *Tsaddik*, the Righteous One, indicates how serious this effort was. Other, less emotion-laden images presented themselves to the Kabbalists, and were indeed employed by them. Instead, however, in the very heart of Kabbalistic concerns and its problematics, we encounter the sexual symbolism of the *Tsaddik* as the principle of procreation within sacred limits, which preserves and spreads harmony in the world.⁵³

What happens when this activity is disturbed and degenerates? Gikatilla discusses this question at some length:

Know that the attribute of the Living God (*El Hai*) called *Tsaddik* is ready to look and to see and to gaze upon human beings. And when it sees that human beings are engaged in the Torah and the commandments, and that they wish to purify themselves and to behave with purity and innocence, the attribute of *Tsaddik* extends itself, and expands and fills with all kinds of influx and emanation from above, to pour out upon the attribute of *Adonai*, in order to give a goodly reward to those who hold fast to Torah and *mitzvot* and who purify themselves. Thus, we find that the entire world is blessed by those righteous people, and the attribute of *Adonai* is also blessed by them; and this is the secret of “the memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing” [Prov. 10:7]. But if, Heaven forbid, human beings contaminate themselves and remove themselves from Torah and the divine commandments, and perform evil and injustice and violence, then the attribute of *Tsaddik* is prepared to look and to see and gaze upon their deeds. When it sees that human beings are contaminating themselves, rejecting the Torah and commandments and performing evil and injustice and violence, the attribute of *Tsaddik* is gathered into itself and withdraws high above; then all the channels and streams drawing down cease, and the attribute of *Adonai* remains as a dry and empty earth and lacking in everything. And this is the secret of “the righteous is taken away from the evil to come” [Isa. 57:1]. . . . He who understands this secret will understand how great is man’s power to build and to

destroy. Now come and see how great is the power of the righteous who adhere to Torah and the commandments, who have the power to unite all the *Sefiroth* and to let peace reign in the upper and lower realms; for the pure and upright man unites the qualities of righteousness and justice (*Tsaddik* and *Tsedek*). God is then called One, and he brings harmony to the supernal family and to the earthly family. Heaven and earth are thus united by this man; happy is his portion and happy is she who gave birth to him.⁵⁴

The function of the lower *Tsaddik* is described in a similar manner in Meir ibn Gabbai's *Avodath ha-Kodesh* (1531), II, 2. His commentary proceeds from a midrash on the Psalms:

They stated in *Midrash Shoher Tov*,⁵⁵ in a passage on the psalms, "When Israel went out of Egypt": "Said R. Pinhas ha-Kohen bar Hamma; The Holy One blessed be He sows the deeds of the righteous in that heaven whose name is *Aravoth* [the uppermost of the seven heavens], and it bears fruits." This Heavenly *Aravoth* is equated with the "Righteous One of the World and of its Foundation, for all the good oil flowing from the "white head" [i.e., *Kether*; cf. Ps. 133:2] to all sides mingle therein, and the deeds of the righteous are emanated from there, and the seeds of peace are sown there. For [in terms of its substance] the seed is drawn from the brain and reaches the tip of the phallus, and is emptied into its mate; and this is the secret of its bearing fruits, by way of the mystery of true union and unification. And the cause of all this lies in the deeds of the righteous, who ascend upwards with the perfection of their mediation, and are reflected and absorbed in that firmament; and this is the sowing of which we have spoken [in that midrash]⁵⁶

The *Zohar* likewise discusses the "sowing of light" by the righteous in its explication of Psalm 97:11, "Light is sown for the Righteous One."

The Holy One, blessed be He, sowed this light in the Garden of Eden, and He arranged it in rows with the help of the Righteous

One, who is the gardener in the Garden. And he took this light, and sowed it as a seed of truth, and arranged it in rows in the Garden, and it sprouted and grew and produced fruit, by which the world is nourished. This is the meaning of the verse "Light is sown for the righteous . . ." (Psalm 97:11). And it is written "The garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth" (Isaiah 61:11). What are "the things that are sown in it"? These are the sowings of the primal light, which is always sown. Now it brings forth and produces fruit, and now it is sown as at the beginning. Before the world eats this fruit, the seed produces and gives fruit, and does not rest. Consequently, all the worlds are nourished through the supply of the gardener, who is called the Righteous One, and who never rests or ceases, except when Israel is in exile.

You might object that it is written, concerning the time of the exile, "The waters fail from the sea, and the river is drained dry" (Job 14:11). How then can it produce offspring? But it is written "sown"—it is continually sown. From the time that the river ceases, the gardener does not enter the Garden. But the light, which is continually sown, produces fruit, and it is sown of itself, as at the beginning, and it does not rest at all, like a garden that goes on producing, and some of the seed falls in its place, and it continues to produce by itself, as at the first. You might say that the offspring and the fruit are the same as when the gardener is there. But it is not so. On the other hand, the seed is never absent.⁵⁷

Thus, the garden in which the gardener sowed his seed is in a state of exile; it is no longer in its original state of harmony, and wild plants grow from those seeds that had been planted there earlier—and from these seeds the world is nourished. But the author of the *Zohar* does not always go so far in detracting from the gardener's function. In many other passages, the activity of the divine *Tsaddik* remains connected to that of the earthly righteous man even during the period of Exile, and the hidden light sown in him continues to bear fruit and to sustain the world.

The general function of the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik*—namely, to maintain the existence of Creation—is joined by a second function. One might ask: what comes into being from the sacred marriage of *Tsaddik* and the *She-*

khinah? The *Zohar*'s answer is: the souls of the righteous. Thus, a unique element is emanated into the substance of life—the *Tsaddik* procreates the righteous. While the souls of the righteous, as the bearers of the harmony and the “seed of peace,” may not literally be created in this process of sacred marriage (in terms of their innermost being, they were already hidden away within the divine wisdom, and they reach the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik* in the form of seed, with the stream of emanation); at this point, however, they begin their road to individual existence. Yet they strive to return to the place from whence they have come. Every individual holy soul is like a spark of the all-encompassing “Life of the Worlds,” whose law each one carries within himself.⁵⁸

IV

In the preceding sections I have tried to understand the *Tsaddik* as a symbol within the world of Kabbalah; indeed, the basic images and characteristic thematic connections with which we have become acquainted here recur again and again in all later Kabbalistic writings. The symbolic image of the *Tsaddik* as one of the aspects of the Sefirotic world also affected the understanding of the earthly righteous man. Even though the divine status of the *Tsaddik* may have derived from the hypostatizing of the human *Tsaddik*, this projection acquired its own dynamic and in turn affected the original. Inspired by the Kabbalists, a rich literature emerged dealing with the problems of conduct in life and the ethical ideals of Judaism. At this point we must ask whether the mystical symbol of the *Tsaddik*, as we have come to understand it, expresses itself in the ideal figure of the *Tsaddik* in Musar literature (the ethical writings of the Kabbalists) and, in its footsteps, in Hasidism? Is there a link between the Hasidic *Tsaddik* and these Kabbalistic images, and how did the Hasidic image of the *Tsaddik* acquire its final form in intellectual and social history?

As deeply committed as the followers of both Kabbalah and Hasidism were to the concepts of Kabbalistic theosophy, there nevertheless seems to be an important difference between the two levels of meaning of the

Tsaddik: the mystical and the social. The procreative element that struck us in the symbol of the *Tsaddik* and that could, in a modern (albeit non-theological) sense, be designated as the creative element therein, encounters a difficult set of problems in the transition from the mystical to the social level. Could the sexual character of the symbol of the *Tsaddik*, its element of creative influx, be preserved following its passage to the social sphere—as applying even to the concrete reality of the earthly *Tsaddik*? Could the dynamics of this symbol survive its transposition to the historical plane, or was its essence bound to disappear? Did this transition perforce turn mysticism into an ideology, in which authentic symbols could no longer carry out their function?

But I am getting ahead of myself; before discussing these problems, let us return to our point of departure. We began by drawing a distinction between the *Tsaddik*, the righteous person, and the *Ḥasid*, the pious man, as two basic prototypes in rabbinic typology. This distinction is still exceedingly sharp in those medieval ethical Musar writings not yet influenced by the Kabbalah. The *Ḥasid*'s radical behavior arouses opposition; indeed, he must be prepared for this from the very start, because of his very nature, because he reflects the nonconformist element in society. No such opposition is aroused by the *Tsaddik*, who would never dream of practicing this kind of extremism. But a certain tendency to blur the terminological distinctions is discernible early on; when these medieval writings speak of the *Tsaddik* and the *Ḥasid*, it is not always clear whether or not these words are synonymous. Particularly the charismatic element, originally an attribute of the *Ḥasid*, is transposed more and more to the *Tsaddik*. Nevertheless, there is still a clear sense of the distinction between the two, which is not yet blurred in the Kabbalistic Musar literature, especially in its classical form. The definitions of the moral ideal of the Righteous One vacillate between the original sobriety that characterized it, and a mystical exuberance. R. Bahya ben Asher, a contemporary of the author of the *Zohar*, can already state that the *Tsaddik* has achieved "the perfection of protection and [Divine] Providence, and he is deserving to encompass the totality of all goodness in the world, known as 'the sewn light,' because he is in communion with God, and the Divine Providence is in communion with the *Tsaddik*."⁵⁹ Yet the same author also offers the

following sober definition: “The chief principle of the entire Torah and its foundation is that man should break his passions and subjugate and humble them, until he brings them under the control of the rational soul. One who does so, making his reason dominate his passion, and breaking and subjugating his animal soul, is called a righteous man.”⁶⁰ We are likewise already familiar with Gikatilla’s definition of the *Tsaddik* as one who puts everything in the world in its proper place.

Even Luria’s disciple, R. Hayyim Vital (1543–1620), in his highly influential treatise on the ethical teachings of the Kabbalah, explained these concepts in a manner that still assumes the superiority of the *Hasid*:

The man whose spirit moves him to become pure and holy and to truly take upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, will prepare himself with all his strength to fulfill the 613 commandments [of the Torah], for by their fulfillment he will perfect the 613 organs and sinews of his rational soul. For if he yet lacks any one of the 248 positive commandments, he lacks an organ of his soul, and of him is it said, “That which is wanting cannot be numbered” [Eccles. 1:15]. And this is more severe than the rule, “For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach” [Lev. 21:18]. But one who has fulfilled them but violated one of the 365 negative commandments is literally called “one who has a blemish,” for the vessel and sinew that draws the influx through the organs has been distorted, and concerning him it is said, “That which is crooked cannot be made straight” [Eccles., *ibid.*]. That is, after his departure from this world; for there is neither performance of the lacking commandments, called “deed,” nor repentance to correct sins, save in this world, as is written, “for there is no work nor device”—neither performance of positive commandments, nor accounting of negative commandments, nor knowledge of Torah itself—“in the grave, whither thou goest” [Eccles. 9:10]. Therefore, so long as he did not perform the 613 commandments, he is called an imperfect *Tsaddik*, for it was not for naught that Moses our teacher recited prayers corresponding to the number [i.e., *gematria* of] *Va-etḥanan* [“and I besought”; Deut. 3:23], merely in order to enter the Land, but to perfect his soul with the performance of all

613 commandments. But one who has fulfilled all of them, but has not yet made his good qualities an integral component of his nature, but still needs to struggle with his evil drive in order to give them control—such a person is called a perfect *Tsaddik* who controls his drive. But when all the good qualities have become an integral part of his own nature, so that he observes the commandments of the Torah in joy and with love of God, without any provocation of the Evil Urge, because the corporeality within him has become completely refined, as King David said, “My heart is empty within me” [Ps. 109:22]. And he also said, “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty . . . I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child with his mother” [Ps. 131:1,2]. It then appears as if goodness has been his nature since he came out of his mother’s womb—such a person is called a perfect *Hasid*.⁶¹

(It is interesting to note that the terminological distinction made at the end of this passage is taken from Maimonides’ *Eight Chapters*!)

For Vital, the *Hasid* occupies the first rung of the hierarchy of piety, at whose pinnacle is the saint or holy man (*kadosh*). Here, too, the *Tsaddik* is the ideal representative of the observance of the norm. By contrast, becoming a pious man or a saint is not contingent upon the person’s own will, but depends upon factors outside his control. In his systematic presentation of the Kabbalah, Vital formulates the rank of the *Tsaddik* as that in which one has achieved the taming of the passions, bringing about the purification of the physical matter of the body and its transformation into pure form: “This is the level of the righteous, to refine their bodies and to make it into form.”⁶² This suggests that the *Hasid* succeeds in turning matter into form without needing to struggle with his impulses. In Hasidic discussions this definition of the *Tsaddik* as “the man of form” plays an important role.

In the history of later Kabbalah, particularly following the great messianic shock of Sabbatianism, there repeatedly emerged groups of *Hasidim* who hoped to attain charismatic gifts by means of radical commitment and extreme enthusiasm. This is not the place to discuss the history of such groups; it is, however, important to emphasize that they encoun-

tered widespread opposition. The most important author of later Kabbalistic Musar literature was the Italian mystic, Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707–1747), whose handbook, *Mesillath Yesharim* (The Path of the Upright), became a classic work of Hebrew literature and exerted immense influence. Luzzatto was the first Kabbalist to attempt to describe the path to the ideal of *Hasiduth* in a way that would not arouse hostility. His tragic life suggests that such an undertaking was doomed to failure. In his book he describes the road leading man in a steady ascent to the highest degrees of spiritual perfection and sanctification. But Luzzatto also clearly distinguished between two different realms. The former is accessible to all, and leads to the ideal prototype of the perfect *Tsaddik*: “The majority of the community are unable to be *Hasidim*, and it is sufficient that they be *Tsaddikim*.” The transition to that realm that leads to the path of the *Hasid*, which is the path of man’s *devekuth* with God, depends upon a special divine gift:

The highest level of holiness is a gift; all that man can do is to attempt it, through the pursuit of true knowledge and constant concentration of the intellect upon the holiness of one’s acts. But it is attained when the Holy One blessed be He will guide him in the way that he wishes to follow, and bring upon him His holiness and sanctify him. He will then succeed in this thing, so that he may continue to commune with God, may He be blessed, continuously. . . . until there rests upon him a spirit from on high, and the Creator, blessed be He, will cause His name to rest upon him, as he does to all His holy ones, so that he will literally be like an angel of God.⁶³

The highest rung on the path of *Hasiduth* is *devekuth*, communion between man and God, which is impossible without a special charisma; this is the ultimate ideal of the *Hasid*, which is only attainable within the realm of mysticism. One must adhere to the ideal of the Righteous One in building a community of God-fearing people. Moreover, Luzzatto polemicizes against false notions of *Hasiduth* widespread among the public, especially the educated strata, which led them to identify Hasidic conduct with practices contrary to reasonable behavior.

Many customs and ways are known among many people under the name of piety (*Hasiduth*), and they are naught but images of piety, without shape or form and without correction; these result from a lack of true reflection and enlightenment among those who have these attributes, for they did not trouble or labor to learn the way of God with clear and straight knowledge, but became pietists and followed that which came their way upon first thought, and did not profoundly examine these things or weigh them upon the scales of wisdom. And these people made the name of piety contemptible in the eyes of the masses of the people and the learned among them, as one would already think that piety is dependent upon vain matters or things which go against reason or proper knowledge, and that all piety depends only upon the recitation of many petitions and lengthy confessions and weeping and prostrations and afflictions by which a person tortures himself to death, such as immersion in snow and ice and the like.⁶⁴

Luzzatto's book was written in Amsterdam in 1740; at the same time, in the small towns and villages of East Galicia and Podolia, there were taking shape under the inspiration of R. Israel Baal Shem Tov those groups from which there would emerge the great religious movement which, in the mind of posterity, was to monopolize the name Hasidism. Their religious enthusiasm led them to establish groups that became devoted to the very practices rejected by Luzzatto, or admitted only with reservations. In particular, these groups reversed the order and priority established by Luzzatto regarding the ideal of *devekuth*. Whereas he had placed man's communion with God at the pinnacle of the path toward *Hasiduth*, they placed this communion at its outset.⁶⁵

One of the most striking paradoxes of this movement was the complete reversal of the above-mentioned linguistic usage. Those figures who were the spiritual leaders of these groups, who were committed heart and soul to the full realization of the demands of this movement and thus rightfully viewed as its true representatives, were called—surprisingly—*Tsaddikim*, the righteous. Their adherents and admirers, on the other

hand, who placed themselves under their leadership while being unable to themselves fulfill the ideal demands, were known as *Hasidim*. The images of the true *Hasid* and of the true *Tsaddik* found in the ancient definitions were hence joined together in the new figure of the Hasidic *Tsaddik*. This was indeed a very odd development: an admirer of the earlier Hasidic ideals who had not attained them personally would never have dreamt of calling himself a *Hasid*. Indeed, a certain semantic wavering is still apparent at the beginning of the Hasidic movement; the Baal Shem Tov himself was not referred to by his followers as a *Tsaddik*. In his own statements—so far as these are recognized as authentic—he used various terms to denote the ideal representatives of his doctrine. In those passages where his grandson, rendering the Baal Shem's words, uses the word *Tsaddik*, older formulations of the same or similar utterances employ such phrases as “a fit person” (*adam kasher*), “a wise man” (*hakham*), “a true scholar” (*talmid-hakham amiti*), or even “the perfect man” (*ha-adam ha-shalem*) or “the head of the generation” (*rosh ha-dor*).⁶⁶ *Tsaddik* is only one of these terms, and by no means the most frequent or obvious; indeed, the very oldest Hasidic writings contain references to the same careful distinction between the terms *Tsaddik* and *Hasid* as we have seen above, in which *Hasid* always designates the higher rank. Such differentiations were only possible if the term *Tsaddik* had not yet taken on the fixed meaning of a Hasidic leader.⁶⁷ This terminological unclarity disappeared only when the Baal Shem's disciple, Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezhirech, and especially the latter's disciples, established the *Tsaddik* as a necessary institution of Hasidic life. It is highly significant that the more modest term, *Tsaddik*, gained acceptance to designate the ideal prototype, notwithstanding the extravagant and exaggerated claims made on his behalf. Hardly coincidentally, the same restraint is shown in the popular term used in the vernacular Yiddish in lieu of the Hebrew term *Tsaddik*: a *gitter-yid*, literally “a good Jew.” A *gitter-yid* is a Jew who behaves as he ought to, one who tries to live his life by the standards of Judaism. The Yiddish term corresponds to the Hebrew *Yehudi kasher*, a recurring phrase in the ethical writings of those generations. The use of these modest terms to describe the highest spiritual level of a human being recalls a similar

linguistic development among the medieval Catharists of southern France: their leaders were simply called *les bonshommes*—literally “the good men”—even though they were the true representatives of the highest ideal.

In order to understand the Hasidic concept of the *Tsaddik* and its lasting importance in this movement, we must note those elements that combined to form something new without going into the details of these terminological changes per se. The Hasidic *Tsaddik* is heir to everything the Talmud has to say about the Righteous One—from the simplest to the most rapturous descriptions—as well as of the characteristics of the talmudic *Hasid*. Moreover, the Hasidic *Tsaddik* incorporates those attributes that the Kabbalah ascribed to the *Tsaddik*, as we tried to present more precisely above. These characteristics, especially in the forms they assumed in the *Zohar* and in Gikatilla's writings, appear throughout Hasidic literature. In this respect, the Hasidim relied extensively upon the Kabbalistic tendency to link, or even to identify, the earthly manifestation of the *Tsaddik*, the Righteous One, with the *Tsaddik* as symbol. Numerous passages in the earliest Hasidic texts indicate that their authors were fully aware of the connection between their own and the older Kabbalistic concept. However, two additional elements were needed in order to make the Hasidic *Tsaddik* what he was. One element is highly visible in Hasidic writings; the other is concealed.

The Hasidic *Tsaddik* incorporates the older figure of the *mokhiah*, the preacher of morals. This element entered Hasidism, not so much from the theory of earlier Kabbalah, as from the practical life of Polish Jewry during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *mokhiah* was a person who took upon himself the task of teaching others the path to be followed in order to fulfill the ethical ideal: this was generally an ethic with a strongly ascetic and “Hasidic” tone (in the older sense of the word used by medieval Ashkenazic Pietists, as represented in the thirteenth-century *Sefer Hasidim*). These teachers of morality (literally, “admonishers” or “reprimanders”) or itinerant preachers (*maggidim*) were propagandists who made radical demands on the individual. Although as itinerant preachers they spoke to the community, their true concern was

to arouse each individual Jew. They rarely had a fixed home or official position in the larger Jewish community; they were often highly learned and profoundly restless men who wandered from place to place, calling for penitence. The very presumption involved in the act of preaching in public must have kindled resentments; in order to overcome this, they needed minimally to embody their radical demands in their own persons. Even so, a tangible antagonism frequently existed between the talmudic scholars and these preachers of repentance, a hostility that is well documented even prior to the time of the Baal Shem Tov. These *mokhiyim* attacked the scholars, in whom intellect had stifled all religious feeling; one of them even castigated the scholars as "Jewish devils."⁶⁸

The preacher of ethics hence needed to answer the same question as the later Hasidic *Tsaddik*: why should one bother to listen to his teachings and reprimands, when anyone could read and reflect upon works of ethics at home? One such wandering preacher, Abraham ben Eliezer of Shebreshin in Volhynia recorded a discussion held in 1714 with several scholars who opposed his activities. I do not see it as a coincidence that his response was based upon the identical argument that was offered later on in Hasidic literature to justify the necessity of the *Tsaddik*:

There are books on medicine filled [with information] like the stormy sea, yet one who is not expert in them and their terminology through what he has learned from others could not use them to heal his severe illness, even were he to read everything written therein, for their benefit is in what he has learned through the actions of his teacher, for action is the greatest example. . . . And after receiving that from an expert physician, he may read. So it is in the ways of repentance: a person will not be so aroused from a book as he will be aroused and awakened by one who preaches with weeping and a loud and bitter voice, reminding him of incidents and occurrences that break man's heart.⁶⁹

In this context, we must not forget that the majority of early Hasidic leaders, particularly the most important ones, held the position of *mo-*

khiah rather than that of rabbi in their communities. Hence, in Hasidism, the *mokhiah* and the Kabbalistic *Tsaddik* were merged into one figure.⁷⁰ The transition is clear: the educational and inspirational function of the *mokhiah* was combined with an intensely personal embodiment of religious life to form the image of the *Tsaddik*. Indeed, this is how, for example, R. Nahum of Chernobyl, who was himself a *mokhiah*, described the *Tsaddik*'s function:

It is an everyday experience that, even though one may study Torah and [writings concerning] the fear of God, he does not observe them or take them to heart. But when he comes to the *Tsaddik* and hears his remonstrance, his words pierce into him like a burning fire, inspiring him with awe of God, which is expressed in practice. The reason for this is that, even though he has studied Torah, his vitality is not purified so long as he is absorbed in his passions. Hence, when he "learns" [i.e., studies the holy writings] and speaks out of that self-absorbed vitality, he cannot rise above his self-absorption. The *Tsaddik*, however, who has cut himself off from corporeality and the passions and speaks with a clear and refined vitality that flows into him from the Creator, may He be blessed, gathers within himself all those [as yet unpurified] words and ties them to the Creator. Thus, every positive quality present in the *Tsaddik* is purified and radiant, so that the *Tsaddik* can find an entrance for this quality in every human being who listens to his words about the practice of such a quality and its ethics.⁷¹

But another element also contributed to the development of this new image of the *Tsaddik* as the central figure in the Hasidic community—albeit an underground one and, unlike the previously discussed elements, one never admitted to in any Hasidic writings. This element is the legacy of the Sabbatian movement, both in terms of its own innovative concepts of pneumatic and prophetic leadership, and the paradoxical and heretical developments of its theology. Sabbatai Zevi's messianic movement, which shook the very foundations of seventeenth-century Judaism,⁷² sought to break open the gates of salvation; in so doing, it deeply transformed the

prototype of the societal leader. This is not surprising: a movement that announced the coming of an entirely new and transformed world, *'Olam ha-Tikkun*, in which all things would be changed and reintegrated, naturally rejected the traditional figure of the rabbi as talmudic scholar. The living core of the group, the bearer of messianic hope and tidings, was to be found in the prophet and visionary, whose heart had been touched by God. A new kind of spiritual authority necessarily had to emerge here, which was bound to conflict with the older rabbinical authority. Once the movement was banned, the underground sectarian mood that developed prevented any compromise between these two types of leadership.

The basic thesis upon which the Sabbatian heresy was based—the paradoxical and shocking doctrine of the Messiah's necessary apostasy in order to bring salvation—could only result in a dialectical destruction of any notion of true spiritual authority. In these circles everything hinged on the personality and charisma of the man recognized as a prophet or representative of the apostate Messiah. The ineluctable result of this explosion of intense feeling unparalleled in Jewish history since the Bar Kokhba rebellion was an irrational, highly emotional attitude. Much as the theologians of Sabbatianism sought to rationalize it, there was something essentially irrational in their defense of the basic doctrine, that is, the paradoxical idea of apostasy as a camouflage for the Messiah's redemptive mission into the depths of impurity.

No doubt influenced by its contact with pre-Hasidic pietist groups, which were filled with crypto-Sabbatians,⁷³ Hasidism adopted the principle of pneumatic leadership, which was intrinsically opposed to traditional rabbinic leadership. Men of prophetic quality, who were seen as living on a different plane from ordinary mortals, were now recognized as the central figures. This notion was absorbed in the new concept of the *Tsaddik* that developed within the Hasidic movement. The mystical symbol of the Kabbalah and its earthly representative, the popular preacher of awakening, and the living prophet who announced a life filled with paradoxes (a Sabbatian legacy), were here fused into one image. On a new level and under new circumstances, the Hasidic *Tsaddik* was constituted of those elements that each of these types, taken separately, had

represented in their own time in the consciousness of their followers. It is in vain that even in our time there are those who attempt to obscure this central fact.

The connection between the heretical groups of Sabbatian mystics and the earliest bearers of Hasidic teachings is admittedly not based on any doctrinal similarity. In this respect, everything was transformed. Yet nearly all of the characteristic themes of Sabbatian paradox reappear in one form or another in the writings of the earliest Hasidic theologians, R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye and R. Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhibezh, men who by no stretch of the imagination can be viewed as Sabbatians. Yet during the early and middle eighteenth century, this type of thinking was widespread in Podolia, the center of Polish Sabbatianism; the leaders of Hasidism used these ideas in their own creative fashion, giving them a constructive and positive twist within the context of their own movement. This cannot, however, obscure the true origin of some of the most popular and important theses of this movement regarding its new doctrine of the *Tsaddik*. This applies, above all, to the central notion of the necessary descent of the *Tsaddik* and the positive meaning of this descent for the structure of the Hasidic community. Nowhere does such a thesis appear in any earlier rabbinical or Kabbalistic Musar works; it is astonishing that earlier scholars of Hasidism, no doubt largely for apologetic reasons, ignored the obvious genealogy of such a thesis. The need for the true *Tsaddik* to disguise himself in order to conquer the realm of evil follows the same reasoning and employs the same metaphors in Hasidic writings as were offered by the Sabbatians in apology for the mystical apostasy of their own Messiah. The antinomian sting born by this paradox in its Sabbatian form has been carefully removed, but the idea itself remains: that by his very nature, the *Tsaddik*'s path is fraught with peril and skirts abysses. These dangers cannot be pushed aside or avoided by some clever maneuver, but are a substantive part of his task and must be confronted head on—as is done in “the elevation of alien thoughts” and their correction in their source. After all, it is this unique combination of unshakable and unlimited trust in God, together with the demand (tersely put) “to live dangerously,” that provides the most salient characteristic of the figure of the *Tsaddik* in Hasidism.

V

What, then, is the Hasidic concept of the *Tsaddik*, as it took shape under the influence of the creative amalgamation of all these elements, and as it developed in Hasidic writings itself before it became a subject for legend and hagiography?⁷⁴ The statements of the Baal Shem Tov and of his major disciples are quite clear about this matter, even though the writings on this subject of the Maggid of Mezhirech and his disciples were characterized by extravagant formulations of a mystical nature that were quite alien to the utterances of the Baal Shem himself.

For the Baal Shem Tov, the ideal figure is the man who fulfills the one central, basic demand placed upon him: to live in constant communion with God (*devekuth*), so that even his active life will be filled with the intention to raise the holy sparks that, according to the Lurianic Kabbalah, are scattered in all things and in all realms of being. The soul of the *Tsaddik* is itself rooted in the World of Divine Emanation, *'Olam ha-'Atsiluth*, so that he is subject to the spiritual law of this sphere, which is "above the law of nature."⁷⁵ His mission is to fight against evil: "Whenever a proper and righteous man is to be created, there is a protest in heaven before the soul descends into the body. Satan rages against it because this one will lead his contemporaries back to the good path."⁷⁶ The Baal Shem Tov focuses directly upon the *Tsaddik's* activities on behalf of his generation. The figure of the *Tsaddik* who remains hidden does not much interest him, even though his followers speak a great deal about the special class of the "hidden righteous" who operate anonymously, in solitude or unrecognized by society.⁷⁷ The Baal Shem Tov is concerned with the *Tsaddik* who goes out and exposes himself to struggle; the *Tsaddik* is not an isolated figure:

The entire world constitutes a unity, a complete structure (*kamah shlemah*) [i.e., reflecting the totality of the *Sefiroth*]⁷⁸—this one is the head, this one the eye, that one the leg. If, therefore, a man commits a sin, something of that sin is mirrored even in the Whole Ones of Israel [i.e., the Righteous]. If [the *Tsaddik*] eradicates and erases the stain that he finds in himself and does penitence before

God, because of this that sinner will also repent. . . . And this is what is meant by “peace be upon Israel” [Ps. 128:6]—when the faithful in Israel, the heads of the generation, are whole, then the masses of the people are also humble.⁷⁸

This basic idea is the key to understanding the subsequent hypertrophy of the doctrine, which scholars of Hasidism have rightly dubbed “Tsaddikism.” The *Tsaddik* certainly has extraordinary powers as an envoy of the spiritual world and a helper of mankind—and the Baal Shem Tov’s statements allow no doubt as to this power.⁷⁹ Nowhere in his thought do we find the concept of the *Tsaddik* as a fixed institution; however, the enthusiastic and sublime utterances about the ideal figure of the movement could easily be transposed to the practical establishment of this institution, which was bound to evolve from the application of the doctrine regarding the function of the Righteous One.

The Baal Shem frequently speaks of the *Rosh ha-Dor*, the leader of the generation, in the spiritual sense of the person who lives in communion with God, but utilizes his power in order to draw his contemporaries upward with him. Thus, the Baal Shem Tov (or his early colleague and disciple, R. Menahem Mendel of Bar) describes the path of the true *mo-khiah* who, in his eyes, obviously belongs among these spiritual leaders:

I heard from the Rav and Maggid, our master and teacher R. Menahem Mendel, concerning that which is stated in the *Zohar* [II, 128b]: “He who takes the hand of the wicked and attempts to make him abandon the path of evil, ascends three ascents.” . . . If one says words of rebuke and morality to the people of his town, he should first strive to bind himself to God, may He be blessed, and then bind and connect himself to them, and form a unity and totality with them. For the leaders of the generation and their contemporaries have a common root for their souls. If he acts thus, the Lord his God will be with him, and he will ascend with them to bind them to God. And that is why the *Zohar* speaks of “taking their hand to raise them up.” . . . And I also heard this from my master [i.e., the Besht] concerning the elevation of the matter of prayer as well.⁸⁰

Moreover, "the leader of the generation is able to ennoble all of the speech and idle talk of his contemporaries, to unite the material and the spiritual, like the two pranksters" mentioned in the Talmud.⁸¹ The talmudic anecdote alluded to here, which the Baal Shem Tov evidently found especially appealing and which indeed has an authentically Hasidic tone, explains that Rabbi Beroka was in the habit of going to the marketplace of his town in Babylonia, where the Prophet Elijah visited him. R. Beroka asked him whether there were any "children of the World to Come" [i.e., people who would enjoy everlasting bliss] in the marketplace. Elijah pointed out two brothers who were walking by and said, "These two." The rabbi asked them: "What do you people do?" They said, "We are jesters. If someone is feeling sad, we try to cheer him up, and if we see people fighting, we try to make peace between them."⁸² These jesters are righteous men after the Baal Shem's own heart: they do not sit at home thinking about their own salvation, but work in the dirty bustling marketplace, as he himself loved to do. The strength of their communion with God is proved in their ability to permeate coarse matter and raise it to the level of spirituality. The most humble and routine activity thus serves as an instrument for supreme achievement.

The above statement that the true leader can even elevate the everyday small talk of his fellow men indicates that the Baal Shem Tov himself did not balk at extravagant utterances on this subject. The *Tsaddik* himself participates in this everyday conversation, to which he gives a spiritual aspect by his contemplative activity. This paradox doubtless had its dangerous side, no less than the similar thesis, which also had its root in the Sabbatian tradition, that one can virtually detoxify and transform sin and evil by contemplative absorption. By means of this contemplation one transforms ("sweetens") them at their very roots—albeit not by living them out in actuality, as was done by the Sabbatians, but by binding them to their root in holiness.⁸³ In this version of the paradox the social sphere is seen as the proper medium for expressing the pneumatic power of the *Tsaddik*. The righteous man originally enters the social sphere in order to spiritualize it and to restore active life to its spiritual roots; in so doing, however, the *Tsaddik* is himself transformed. The true friend of God becomes the true friend of man, and the accent shifts imperceptibly. One

of the main terms of Hasidism is *ḥayyuth*, vitality, identified in Hasidic writings with the concept of *shefa*⁶, the divine influx that, as we saw earlier, flows from the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik* to the lower worlds, particularly to the earthly *Tsaddikim* who represent the light of this *Sefirah* in their own lives. The two notions—the influx flowing into the *Tsaddik* through his own communion with God, and the spiritual vitality always spoken of here as his dynamic essence—become unified in a single concept of vital energy flowing from the *Tsaddik* to his contemporaries.⁸⁴ Thereafter, of course, this general claim was applied to the specific leader and the members of his group, who received their *shefa*⁶ from him.

The Lurianic doctrine of the uplifting of the sparks, which constitute the spiritual vitality of the world, demands a separation between the spiritual and the material, which had come to dominate the former. If carried to its logical conclusion, the world would ultimately be emptied of its pneumatic element, and the raising of the holy sparks would serve a destructive rather than a corrective, world-sustaining function. The Baal Shem Tov was well aware of the destructive aspect of this teaching, which he accepted, as illustrated in an important dialogue recorded by Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir.⁸⁵ This point throws into question the existentialist reading of this doctrine, such as is found in Martin Buber's later writings on Hasidism. The notion of the overflowing quality of the divine influx may run counter to the notion that the world is emptied by the raising of the sparks (a far cry from Buber's glorification of the "concrete"); yet these two notions are actually coupled in Hasidic writings, and constitute a new development of the doctrine of the *ḥayyuth* vivifying the worlds. The *Tsaddik*, rather than drawing vitality from the material sphere, adds to it something of the spiritual power emanating from within himself, or at least maintains that sphere in an uneasy equilibrium—renewed from moment to moment—between the sparks raised upward by his activity and the vitality that streams downward from him. The contradiction between these two basic conceptions was never fully resolved in Hasidic teaching.

But there are many ways to affect other people and to connect with them spiritually, and direct social contact is not always judged as sympathetically as it was by the Baal Shem Tov himself. Naturally, everything

depends upon the personality of the *Tsaddik*. At times, the ideal method for leaders to attain their “ascent” seemed to be through retreat from society:

If it is agreed and room is allowed for the leaders of the generation, who seek isolation, to attach themselves to God, may He be blessed, through prayer and study, and that they be free of communal concerns, this solitude will be of benefit for him and for them, that they may thereby also connect to Him, may He be blessed.⁸⁶

But even in this case, retreat and isolation are usually seen as only the first step, a preparatory stage for subsequent activity within the framework of the community. One might note that it is precisely the Rabbi of Polonnoye, who is an advocate of this idea, who also formulates his notions of the *Tsaddik*'s social function with considerable lucidity and precision. These notions occur repeatedly, and many of the Baal Shem Tov's authentic utterances indicate that these are indeed a legitimate development of his own teachings.

The Hasidic doctrine of the social function of the *Tsaddik* is illustrated by an image found frequently in the earliest Hasidic writings on this subject: that of the duality of matter and form, which are simultaneously opposed and interconnected. This image was already used in this way by R. Moses Alshekh, the sixteenth-century preacher and Kabbalist of Safed, whose writings were extremely popular among the early Hasidic authors. Every community is composed of two elements: the people of form and the people of matter—i.e., the scholars and the uneducated *vulgus*, who are better off economically but also removed from the spiritual. These two types are mutually dependent, and ought to constitute an organic whole. Form tries to imprint itself upon matter and raise it to a higher level, while matter has a natural yearning to be raised up or transmuted into form. At times this correlation appears in the metaphor of body and soul, while at others it appears as a process in which the corporeal element within society is constantly transformed into form:

Man is created out of matter and form, which are two opposites, for matter follows the obstinacy of bodily matter, which is the *ke-*

liploth, while the form craves and desires spiritual things. And the purpose of man's creation is to make of matter form, and that they be one unity, and not separate things. And just as this is the purpose of the individual man, so it is in the totality of the Israelite nation, who are called "the people of the multitude of the House of Israel," because their main involvement is with the earthiness of matter, and therefore they are [likened to] matter. This is not the case of the righteous ones, who engage in Torah and the service of God, who constitute form, for the main aim is that matter become form. . . . And then they, the Israelite nation, are attached to His great Name.⁸⁷

For this conception of the function of the perfect man, i.e., the *Tsaddik*, the author quite justifiably relies upon Maimonides' teachings in *Guide for the Perplexed*.⁸⁸

The figure of the *Tsaddik* is thus seen in terms of his mission among his fellow men. Nevertheless, the essentially contemplative orientation of the Hasidic scale of values—i.e., toward the goal of *devekuth*—is preserved within this framework; in fact, one may say it is precisely this social framework that lends it its special character. We could not speak of a specific world of Hasidism were it not for this attempt to define the role of the saint, and of the *Tsaddik* as a saintly figure, within the framework of an organic, functioning Jewish group. Compared with *Tsaddikism*, all other Hasidic teachings, as bizarre or as important as they may be, could not serve as the basis for a social phenomenon of a distinct physiognomy. Contrary to the accepted view, R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, the chief advocate of this idea, did not envision a special class of *Tsaddikim*, each of whom "served" on behalf of their individual group. Indeed, many statements of the Baal Shem Tov himself indicate, in an even more pointed and penetrating fashion, that he was concerned simply with a spiritual reform of the traditional rabbi, preacher, and Talmud scholar; his main goal was simply to arouse among them a sense of mystical responsibility for the totality of the community—a feeling that, in Hasidic opinion, was evidently lacking in many of these people. The *Tsaddik* is thus delineated here, not as an adversary of the traditional rabbi, but as an improved

version. If things did not develop this way historically, it was due to the other elements in this new ideal, and the fact that its most effective champions were too much rooted in its legacy to easily integrate into the traditional rabbinic ideal. The prophetic and enthusiastic impulses were simply too powerful. What happened may have been unintended, but followed a certain inner logic: the pious scholar, who felt himself destined to spiritually uplift the community, became a rival, endangering the position of the old-fashioned and—if one may phrase it thus—unawakened rabbi.

Highly illuminating in this regard are two popular definitions of the Hasidic *Tsaddik*—or, as he was known in the Yiddish vernacular, the *rebbe*, in contrast with the purely rabbinic scholar, the *rov*. The difference in spelling of the two Hebrew words consists of an additional *yod*, or “point,” in the word *rebbe*. The *rebbe*, says one definition, is a *rov* with a *yod*; that is, a *rov* who has attained that hidden point where he touches the Divine. The second definition interprets the numerical value of the Hebrew letter *yod*, ten, as alluding to the ten men that constitute a *minyan*, a religious community, according to Jewish law. Thus, says the second definition, a *rebbe* is a *rov* with a *yod*, i.e., with a living community—in other words, a community of people who have been awakened and touched by the divine spirit. The ideal advocated by the Rabbi of Polnnoye and the Maggid of Mezhirech was that one be at once both a *rov* and a *rebbe*; however, this ideal was only realized sporadically in the course of the Hasidic movement. Essentially, the two types remained separate, and the *Tsaddikim* became a special type of essentially spiritualistic and charismatic figures.

The writings of Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezhirech are particularly rich in mystical definitions of this prototypical Righteous One. The quality of extremism, which at the beginning of our discussion we saw as an essential quality of the *Hasid*, is now transferred in certain respects to the *Tsaddik*. The *Tsaddik* stands in the realm of nothingness;⁸⁹ this paradoxical statement, inconceivable before Hasidism, combines a purely mystical element with a moral one, fluctuating in emphasis toward one side or another. This nothingness is the divine nothing (*Ayin*): it is that sphere within the Godhead from which all true Creation springs. It is also the

end of the road that the Kabbalist traverses during his absorption in the *Sefiroth*.⁹⁰ On his road toward the divine nothing, he must cast off all individual qualities and distinctiveness, making himself infinitesimally small, indeed, nothing, in order to pass through the "Gateway of Nothingness" (*Sha'ar ha-Ayin* or *Sha'ar ha-Nun*) of which the Maggid of Mezhi-rech speaks. But the "casting off of physicality" attained in prayer also belongs to this nothingness,⁹¹ identified with the state of pure spirituality. It is in this way that the paradoxical utterances about the rank of the *Tsaddik* are explained: because he himself exists in Nothingness, wanting nothing for himself and having nothing that is his own, he becomes purely a medium or vessel through which flows the *shefa'*, the divine influx of vitality, proceeding from him to all beings. Because he has placed himself on the lowest level and regarded himself as nothing, he reaches the center. Because he has nullified himself, becoming a pure medium, "the *Tsaddik* is called a mirror, for everyone who looks at him sees himself as in a mirror."⁹² The talmudic saying "Greater are the deeds of the righteous than the Creation of heaven and earth" is applied to the *Tsaddik* standing at this point of nothingness:

For the Creation of heaven and earth was an act of creating something out of nothing, while the deeds of the righteous create nothing out of something. For all the things which he does, even corporeal ones such as eating, elevate holy sparks of this food to the divine realm. Thus, from every thing, we find that he makes something into nothing.⁹³

But alongside this definition linking the *Tsaddik* to the highest *Sefiroth*, we also find a wealth of utterances concerning the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik*, which are now transposed to the function of the Hasidic *Tsaddik*. All the symbols of this *Sefirah* are transferred to him, but reinterpreted in terms of his function as mediator between heaven and earth.

This characteristic passage shows how closely these Kabbalistic symbols were connected with the new Hasidic idea:

The true *Tsaddik* must attach himself to all levels, even the lowest ones, corresponding to the letter *tav*, and to bring himself up, level

after level, in the mystery of *TaShRaK* [i.e., the reverse sequence of the Hebrew alphabet] to the letter *alef*, which is the Master (*Alufo*) of the World. For as even the lowest levels were created with the letters of the Torah, even the letter *tav* [the last of all letters] contains the revelation of the Godhead, which is the *alef* of the world—albeit in restricted form, at the end of the levels, remote from the *alef*.

Hence, the righteous man who binds himself to the Creator must do so with all the letters of the Torah, from last to first (*tav* to *alef*), to carry all the levels close to the *alef* of the world. For the essence of the perfect service of God consists in raising all the lower levels upward. And that is the meaning of the talmudic saying: “There is one column in the world, and what is it? The Righteous One.” For the *Tsaddik* is called One because of the unity by which he unites himself with all the levels from earth to heaven; that is, from the end of all levels, which is earthly materiality, corresponding to the letter *tav*, to the heavens, which is the highest level, corresponding to *alef*. And that is why the *Tsaddik* is also called the All (*Kol*), as in the verse “for all that is in the heaven and in the earth” [I Chron. 29:11], which Onkelos rendered [in his Aramaic translation] as “who is one in heaven and earth,” because he is included in all the levels, and is one in heaven and earth. Therefore, the *Tsaddik* is called “the Foundation of the World,” like the metaphor of a building that rests upon its foundation; when one wishes to lift it, one must do so from underneath its foundation, and thereby the entire building built upon those foundations is lifted up. Likewise, when the *Tsaddik* connects himself with all the levels, when he rises up, so do all the other levels ascend, as in the above metaphor. And this is: “For one *Tsaddik* was the world created.” . . . For the world was only created because of the righteous, who are counted as one—for they unify themselves with all the levels, and by their means all the levels ascend. How much more so must every *Tsaddik* connect himself with all the other *Tsaddikim*, as he must even combine himself with all the other lower levels. Therefore, it says, “one *Tsaddik*”: for even though they are many, they count as one in terms of the oneness [which they together form]. . . . For this rea-

son it is written thereafter: "The world is sustained for the sake of even one righteous man, as is written, 'The righteous is the foundation of the world.' " For the world could not survive without the *Tsaddik* even for a moment, because of the actions of the wicked that bring down the world and tear asunder the divine letters, separating the *tav* from the *alef*. But by the action of the *Tsaddik* in combining and uniting with all the levels, he raises the world above the level of its fall, and it rises and is united in the state of *alef*, which is the Master of the World; and because the foundation is lifted, the entire edifice rises. That is why Torah scholars are called builders, as in [the talmudic wordplay on Isa. 54:13], "Do not read here 'your sons' (*banayikh*) but 'your builders' (*bonayikh*)."⁹⁴

The strong note of sexual symbolism in the Kabbalistic conception, survives in hundreds of Hasidic dicta,⁹⁵ but now tends to refer to the *Tsaddik*'s activities in the community of which he is the center, or to his activity in the community of all living things. The mystical symbolism of life, which we have noted above, is here given free rein. The *Tsaddik* is the Living One, who transcends death and aging; he exists in a state of continuously renewed communion with the source of all life and thereby sustains the balance, harmony, and peace of the world. In this sense the *Tsaddik* is the constantly changing one,⁹⁶ whose essence is flowing and original Judaism, like all religious communities based upon tradition, does not see originality as a particularly important or praiseworthy value; but Hasidism places the figure of the truly original man in the center, as the one who bears the burden of the community. Because he opens the springs from whence flows the stream of life, *hayyuth*, others too can reach those springs.⁹⁷ Their emulation of the *Tsaddik*'s ways allows them to likewise partake in his originality. The Baal Shem Tov loved to quote a talmudic saying concerning one of the so-called "early Hasidim," Hanina ben Dosa, of whom a celestial voice said: "The entire world is nourished because of my son Hanina."⁹⁸ The word here translated as "because of" (*bishevil*) can also be understood in the sense of "path" (*shevil*); the Besht thus meant to say that the entire world was nourished and maintained by the new path opened by Hanina. Every *Tsaddik* finds his own way or path,

and is himself transformed into a path through which the vital strength flows from above to below; the path he opens can then be taken by others. Yet one must remember that the emulation is not as authentic as the original thing. The rabbinic dictum, "many have done . . . as Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, but did not succeed,"⁹⁹ is frequently quoted in this connection. This conception of the *Tsaddik* is not too distant from that which views him as the "living Torah." The holy letters of this Torah, in which the hidden light shines and refracts in an infinity of meaning, themselves become the foundation of life. The *Tsaddik* combines with the spirituality hidden within the letters—a concept much loved by the Besht—which also shines in him; thereby everything he does becomes infinitely significant, like the Revelation itself.

In Hasidic literature, this entire complex of ideas is connected with the doctrine of the descent of the *Tsaddik*, an idea that was developed in the most diverse directions and which, as I have said, was unknown in pre-Hasidic Jewish ethics—either in regard to the *Tsaddik* or to the *Hasid*. It is not always possible to attain the same degree of intensity of *devekuth*, of communion with God; there are periods of ascent and of descent, corresponding to the pulse of life generally. The higher state could easily be seen as one of pure absorption, or even of ecstasy, while the lower state is one in which the tasks of active life are performed, with ceaseless consciousness of the Holy. The Baal Shem was fond of saying that "constant pleasure is no pleasure at all,"¹⁰⁰ and that permanent rapture is impossible. Such fluctuations are a continuous part of the *Tsaddik*'s life with God, even when his life is not viewed in relation to its function for his fellowman. At times there arises the question, How can the *Tsaddik* make this state—which is described in the most disparate terms, even to the point of the remoteness or seeming absence of God—fruitful for his own road? Where is the *Tsaddik*, if he no longer stands in nothingness, and what is he, if he no longer ascends but sinks? For the disciples of the Maggid, this state is first and foremost connected with the social function of the *Tsaddik*, however metaphysically it may be understood. Whether or not this fall is a necessary precondition for his own ascent,¹⁰¹ or whether it is undertaken or submitted to voluntarily out of a sense of mission, in either case the fall of the *Tsaddik* is connected with the life of the com-

munity; the attainment of his true goal is utterly unthinkable without this fall. This paradox is a dangerous one, rooted in the legacy of the Sabbatian messianic doctrine, albeit one that here assumes a positive and constructive meaning, despite its paradoxical nature. The descent is no longer a matter of treachery, apostasy, or demonic preoccupation with evil; it now involves the performance of a task essential to the survival of society. The *Tsaddik* encounters evil by means of his descent, which he transforms by taking it and permeating it contemplatively. This change can take place in the purely mental sphere, or in any other. In order to redeem the wicked, the righteous man does not need to speak to him face to face, to seek his company and to arouse him (the Hasidim were quite imbued with the belief in the magic power of goodness to operate from a distance)—but that, too, is possible. These direct relationships were part of the lives of the great *Tsaddikim* who were the centers of their groups.

The Hasidic community is based upon the mystery of the descent of the *Tsaddik*. “A righteous man falleth seven times and riseth up again” (Prov. 24:16), as the biblical verse says; but when he rises, he raises the community along with himself. The descent of the *Tsaddik* is the great adventure, without which he cannot perform his mission. His descent or fall is portrayed in the Hasidic texts with all the dark devotion and ardor, indeed with the very same images and arguments, as were mustered by the Sabbatians to explain the fall of their Messiah, who converted to Islam. The Hasidic teachers were well aware of the dangers of this undertaking; many remained below, as is frequently emphasized: “The descent is sure, while the ascent is uncertain.”¹⁰² Nevertheless, this is a task to which the *Tsaddik* must submit if he wishes to be true to himself. This is the “descent for the sake of ascent” referred to by the now classical formula.¹⁰³ The *Tsaddik* is similar to the red heifer, whose ashes “render the impure pure, but the pure impure”—an image applied repeatedly to the Messiah in the Sabbatian writings.¹⁰⁴ According to the Hasidic reading, this was the mission carried out by all the great figures of the Bible. It is what Abraham and Moses did, and, according to a statement from the *Tikkunei Zohar* frequently quoted by the Hasidim,¹⁰⁵ every *Tsaddik* contains a spark of Moses in him. The path to community involves the re-

nunciation of mystical isolation with God; however, this renunciation is rooted in the very nature and position of the *Tsaddik*. The Hasidic authors well understood that the relationship of the *Tsaddik* to his contemporaries has its own dialectics. He not only gives freely and generously (a notion that might be suggested by the above-mentioned metaphor of matter and form); he also receives no less than he gives. By attempting to lift up his contemporaries, he himself is raised; the more he fulfills his function as the center and head of the community, the more his own spiritual stature grows. By becoming a medium and vessel for others, the stream of life flowing through him endlessly heightens the intensity of his own life.¹⁰⁶

We have traveled a long road, showing how the mystical symbolism of the *Tsaddik* developed, and how the wealth of meanings in this symbol changed and combined with new elements. Through the biblical and talmudic history of the term, we have seen the range of meanings present in this concept, its transformation in the Kabbalah into a symbol, to once again become a historical factor in the establishment of the central figure of the Hasidic *Tsaddik*. We have come to know the *Tsaddik* as the man totally rooted in God, whose mind is focused upon God in all things. Hasidic writings also contain the notion of the unconscious, which precedes all conscious action and thought, from which the latter arise and upon which they draw. Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezhirech coins his own term for the notion of the unconscious: *Kadmuth ha-Sekhel*.¹⁰⁷ I have found no terser, finer, or more exhaustive definition of the nature and function of the Hasidic *Tsaddik* than an utterance made by the Maggid in 1770: "The *Tsaddikim* make God, if one may phrase it thus, their unconscious."¹⁰⁸

Shekhinah:
THE FEMININE
ELEMENT
IN DIVINITY

I

How fortunate we Kabbalah scholars are! When I compare the efforts of present-day biblical scholars to shed new light on the true, i.e., mythical, character of certain central images in the Hebrew Bible, I see how much of their work is based upon arduously constructed yet highly precarious hypotheses. I then breathe a sigh of relief about my own discipline, in which things are, if I may say so, so much more concrete—or would be, if the Kabbalah were to attract the solid reasoning of scholars rather than the extravagant fantasies of charlatans. At times the Bible scholars are able to advance in their intellectual endeavor only at the price of accepting a dubious alteration in reading or by violating the exact wording of a text. Basically, (and certainly unfortunately), their achievements will seem highly questionable to anyone approaching the biblical text with an impartial mind.

In the Kabbalistic writings of medieval Judaism, all those things that

in the Bible must be forceably wrenched and twisted out are evident here for all to see. With regard to the survival or revival of mythical notions, which modern biblical researchers must strive so hard to clarify, the texts with which the scholar of Kabbalah is concerned allow him to proceed with far greater methodological confidence than do those of the scholars of the religion of ancient Israel or of Judaism after the Babylonian exile. The latter must move across the fertile but shaky ground whose boundaries were first staked off by the brilliant but misleading hypotheses of Hermann Gunkel or Sigmund Mowinckel.

The *Shekhinah*—which we shall for the present define in the most general way as the personification and hypostasis of God's "indwelling" or "presence" in the world—is a concept that has intimately accompanied the Jewish people for some two thousand years, through all phases of its turbulent and tragic existence. The nation expressed the impact of its history in its spiritual and intellectual life in the most diverse forms—in halakhah and aggadah, in philosophy and Kabbalah, in messianic movements and Hasidism. The concept of the *Shekhinah* accompanied them throughout this history, itself undergoing manifold developments and transformations.

II

Do Kabbalistic images of the *Shekhinah* have a prehistory in the biblical text or the Apocrypha? Two questions must be asked here, concerning which at least a few brief remarks would be appropriate. First, does this literature contain any hypostases of divine forces and qualities that are not merely literary personifications or poetic metaphors? Second, does one already find there personifications that are of an essentially feminine character? These two questions have been intensely discussed, and just as vigorously debated, in a voluminous body of writing, which has grown considerably in recent years.¹ Undoubtedly, there are some personifications that are not merely conceptual abstractions, but which are presented in concrete imagery, as if they were independent, self-contained entities. Yet it is extremely difficult to determine where the borderline of

metaphor is crossed: where we are dealing with mere survivals or remnants of older, perhaps ancient Near Eastern mythologies, and where these same ancient images are cloaked in a new guise, in a more moderate form, rendered harmless because of Judaism's hostility to myth. I would not care to join battle with those already struggling in this arena, but I must confess—to cite only the most renowned and outstanding example—that many of the statements made about biblical “Wisdom” and its alleged mythical background strike me as highly hypothetical and tenuous. However, the first of my two questions may already be answered in the affirmative—so long as we are speaking of hypostases of forces, without necessarily seeing them as *divine* forces, that is, without seeing them (as many people do) as aspects of the Godhead itself. One needs to undergo considerable convolutions in order to interpret, for example, the descriptions of Wisdom, or Sophia, in chapters 1 through 10 of Proverbs and chapter 28 of Job, as a hypostasis bearing a divine character. In these effusive descriptions, with their far-reaching impact on the history of religion, Wisdom always quite clearly remains the first of the created beings; it may be older than all visible Creation, but, however ancient, it is always thought of as younger than God and never as coeternal with Him:

The Lord made me as the beginning of His way.
The first of His works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning.
Or ever the earth was. (Prov. 8:22–23)

Here Wisdom was God's “confidant” or “craftsman” at the time of Creation, but was not identified with God Himself; it is a denizen of the invisible world, but hardly an aspect of the one God, much less His spouse.

If the corresponding figures of Wisdom in other religious systems appear as goddesses (some truly ancient if not entirely convincing material has been adduced in this connection), it is here deliberately and resolutely demoted from that rank and stripped of its divine character. From a psychological point of view, it seems unlikely that we would find here

the rebirth or reemergence of that mythical character whose rejection was such a central even in the world of biblical religion. There is a certain impatience in these efforts to discover that which had just been overcome and defeated in these new shapes, as if nothing had ever happened.

We now turn to the second question, concerning the appearance of female hypostases: to the best of my knowledge, pre-Philonic literature contains only a single passage in which Wisdom is spoken of as a bride or spouse, without our needing to resort to forced or distorted interpretations. In the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, we read:

Her I loved and sought out from my youth,
And I sought to take her for my bride.
And I became enamoured of her beauty.
She proclaimeth her noble birth
In that it is given her to live with God,
And the Sovereign Lord of all loved her. (Wisd. of Sol. 8:2–3)

The meaning of these words, however, can only be understood within the context of the entire chapter and in terms of its linguistic usage. Reference is made to Wisdom's "symbiosis" with God throughout this chapter, not only in the generalized sense of intimacy, but in the clear sense of shared conjugal life. The feminine names for Wisdom, which can be quite simply explained as resulting from the feminine gender of the corresponding nouns in Hebrew and Greek, cannot ultimately be cited as proof of the female character of the figure itself.

In Jewish thought the figure of Wisdom first appears in an unequivocally female form in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. In his work on drunkenness, he states:

And thus the Creator [Demiurge] who created our entire universe is rightly called the Father of all Created Things, while we call Knowledge [*Episteme*, identical in Philo with *Sophia*] Mother, whom God knew and procreated [i.e., through her] Creation, albeit not in human fashion. However, she received the divine seed and bore with labor the one and beloved son . . . the ripe fruit that is this world.²

We find here a genuine “sacred marriage” (*hieros gamos*), a metaphor that seems singularly out of place in the ancient Jewish tradition—so much so that some scholars (beginning with Richard Reitzenstein) sought here echoes of Hellenistic myths taken from Egypt.³ It is difficult for me to accept this premise, if for no other reason than that Philo’s image of the Father and Mother creating the universe is in large measure shaped by the biblical verse he is interpreting—i.e., that of the rebellious son, whose father and mother should be trying to save him (Deut. 21:20), but instead bring charges against him. This imagery is virtually dictated by the hermeneutics.⁴

In other passages, too, Philo speaks of God as “the Father of all things . . . and the Husband of Wisdom, who sows the seed of eudaemonia in the good and virginal earth.”⁵ These lines speak of a marriage to a Mother Wisdom, who constantly renews the mystery of her virginity. Hence, she is at once both a virgin bride and a mother—an image that will again appear in highly significant contexts in Kabbalistic symbolism. Wisdom likewise appears as God’s daughter, in an image fusing allegory and archetype in an interpretation of the biblical name Bethuel: “because she is the true daughter [i.e., of God] (*bath el*) and eternally virginal (*bethulah*).”⁶ But in the same passage we immediately find a statement that negates any archetypal understanding of this image:

Now Bethuel is the father of Rebecca [see Gen. 22:23]. But how can Wisdom, God’s daughter, be called a father? Precisely because, although her name is feminine, her nature is masculine. . . . Therefore, we do not concern ourselves with names, but simply declare God’s daughter, Wisdom, to be masculine; for she is the father who sows and breeds wisdom, insight, and virtuous deeds in the souls.

This problem—namely, the male aspects within the female character of Wisdom—will recur in the *Shekhinah* in different but not altogether dissimilar contexts.

I have gone into some detail here about *Hokhmah*, or Sophia, because its connection with the Kabbalistic idea of *Shekhinah* has long drawn scholarly attention. However, we should also mention some other per-

sonifications that were subsequently combined with the image of *Shekhinah* or, like Sophia/Wisdom, linked to it. First and foremost is the maternal image of Rachel, which has appeared repeatedly since the famous image in Jeremiah (chap. 31) of Rachel weeping for her children as they go off into exile; or the personification of Zion as a maternal figure, in contrast with the phrase “daughter of Zion” that alone appears in Scripture. “Mother Zion” is first mentioned in the Septuagint’s reading of Psalms 87:5, whose original text speaks only of Zion:⁷ “But of Zion it shall be said: ‘This man and that was born in her.’” The image was most probably inspired by the verse in Isaiah 66:8: “For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” This image reappears in the later apocalypses, such as IV Ezra, unquestionably the most important Jewish apocalypse, which speaks of Zion as “the mother of us all” (10:7; Kahana, 8:7). Likewise, long before the emergence of the Kabbalah’s symbolic language, talmudic literature occasionally employed the image of Jerusalem or Zion as the Mother of Israel.⁸ But nowhere is Zion used as an expression for any power or quality of God Himself. It may appear as a figure whose home is in the supernal worlds, in a similar way to the ancient Near Eastern notions of a correspondence between the lower and higher worlds. However, in the ancient Jewish writings, Zion has nothing to do with the mystery of the Godhead itself; nor does the “heavenly Jerusalem,” which is already linked by the New Testament to the above-mentioned image of “Mother Zion,” have any presence in the Godhead.

The same holds true for the widespread personification of *Kenesseth Yisra’el*, the “Community of Israel,” employed almost exclusively by rabbinical literature instead of the rare image of “Mother Zion.” This term personifies the collectivity of the nation as a religious figure; it appears in any number of rabbinic statements in the Talmud and the midrash as an active, speaking figure, a spiritual entity having a real existence in the sacral and historical sphere. No wonder this hypostatized image of the “Synagogue” was transformed by the fathers of the ancient Christian community into the image of the “Church” (*Ekklesia*). The Talmud itself already applies biblical phrases that speak about father and mother to the concepts of God as the Father and the Community of Israel as the Mother. Thus, in *Berakhot* 35b:

He who enjoys anything of this world without a blessing is as if he has robbed God and the Community of Israel, as it is written: "Whoso robbeth his father or his mother" [Prov. 28:24]. His father is none other than the Holy One, blessed be He, of Whom it is written: "Is not He thy father that hath gotten thee?" [Deut. 32:6], and his Mother is none other than the Community of Israel, of whom it is written: "Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother" [Prov. 1:8].

In the allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, *Kenesseth Yisra'el* is thought of as being married to God, and it assumes the undeniable characteristics of a female figure. Neither does the aggadah make any attempt to obscure its image as a bride, matron, noble princess, and the like; on the contrary, whenever it discusses the relationship between God and His people in covenantal terms, it invariably uses metaphors and parables (and parable is, after all, the central means of expression in the aggadah) that depict Israel as the female partner in the Covenant. In this respect no text is more informative, or more valuable and impressive, than *Song of Songs Rabbah*. In this midrash *Kenesseth Yisra'el* is adorned with all the attributes of gracious femininity, while the biblical images are read as allegories of historical situations—that is, without their mythic "charge" (assuming they have one, a possibility not to be rejected out of hand in light of contemporary scholarship). Again, it is even plainer here than in the above-mentioned cases (if only because of the great wealth of material available to us) that the authors did not have in mind any image of a divine power. The realm of God never mingles with the realm of *Kenesseth Yisra'el* in which He acts and which is subject to Him. The abyss between the bride and the bridegroom is never bridged, and any sexual imagery that might suggest otherwise is meticulously avoided. But one thing can be said with certainty (and this is no small thing, to be sure!): that all these passages about Wisdom, Zion, and the Community of Israel created a rich treasury of images. Over the course of time, as the power of these images proved to be stronger than the conscious intention of their authors, this treasury was able to nourish an old-new level in the perception of the Divine. This is apparent in Gnosticism, in the Sophia theology

of Christian sects,⁹ and in the Russian Orthodox Church no less than in the Kabbalah. But our knowledge of this historical process, which I would like to refer to as the “Rebellion of Images,” should not induce us to rashly date it to an earlier period, in which it could not have really taken place. However, there is no doubt that such images did appeal to the mystics, who sought to hypostatize such images, so that all they now had to do was to pull them out and use them for their own purposes.

III

Unlike the above-mentioned images, the term *Shekhinah* refers to something that clearly belongs to the divine realm. The term is extremely common in talmudic literature from about the first century B.C.E. or the first century C.E., but does not appear in either the Bible or in nonrabbinic writings, despite some abortive efforts to discover it, disguised, in translations, especially in the New Testament (as in the first chapter of John). Neither is this term found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, insofar as they have been published. In the sources this term refers exclusively to God’s “dwelling” or “presence” in a particular place, but not to any specific dwelling place. This latter notion is expressed in the Hebrew word *mishkan*, used frequently in the Old Testament for God’s dwelling in the Tabernacle or the Temple. In the literal sense, God’s dwelling or *Shekhinah* means His visible or hidden presence in a given place, his immediacy. This presence may be manifested in a supernatural glow of light, known as the “radiance (*ziv*) of the *Shekhinah*.” It is also depicted in various images, such as the “wings of the *Shekhinah*” under which the pious or proselytes take shelter; the “countenance of the *Shekhinah*” beheld by the righteous (perhaps parallel to the “countenance of the Lord” found in the Bible?); and the “feet of the *Shekhinah*,” which are pushed out of the world by those who sin in secret. But the *Shekhinah* can also exist without any particular manifestation of this sort, simply as the presence of God and the awareness of His presence.

The *Shekhinah*, as portrayed in the Talmud, the midrash, and the Aramaic translations of the Bible, is not perceived as a distinct hypostasis of

God Himself. It differs in this respect from such qualities of God as His wisdom, His goodness, or His severity, which are unhesitatingly personified in the aggadah, to the extent that they are able to appear before Him and argue with Him, as if they were personifications of moral aspects of Him which had become independent of His own all-transcendent being. It is by no means self-evident that God's presence in the world was to be identified with His qualities. Thus, the *Shekhinah* is always God Himself, insofar as He is present in a specific place or at a specific event. In other words: we are dealing with an expression—qualified in hyperbolic images—for God Himself, one verging on hypostatization. I would therefore not subscribe to the opinion of such an outstanding scholar as George Foot Moore, who describes the *Shekhinah* as “a kind of verbal smokescreen to conceal the difficulty presented by the anthropomorphic language.”¹⁰

There are no doubt many passages in which the word *Shekhinah* could be substituted by “the Holy One blessed be He” without any change in meaning. “Two people who sit together and engage in words of Torah, the *Shekhinah* is with them”; “The evil-doers remove the *Shekhinah* from the world,” and similar epigrams are discussed in detail by Joshua Abelson in his comprehensive study.¹¹ Indeed, for many utterances about the *Shekhinah*, one in fact does find parallel passages that use the name “the Holy One, blessed be He”; the two terms may even occur in the very same passage with no discernible difference in meaning. This is excellently illustrated by one of the strangest statements in the tannaitic midrashim, an utterance that originated during the period of sharp conflict between rabbinic Judaism and second-century Gnosticism:

“... Thy people, whom Thou didst redeem to Thee out of Egypt, the nations and their gods” [II Sam. 7:23]. . . . Rabbi Akiva said: Were this not a verse written in Scripture, it would be forbidden to say it. Israel says to the Holy One blessed be He, so to speak: “You have redeemed Yourself.” Hence we find that, wherever Israel was exiled, it is as if the *Shekhinah* was exiled with them.¹²

This image of God's self-redemption from His own exile was inferred by, of all people, Rabbi Akiva, the outstanding representative of an esoteri-

cism strictly rooted in Jewish Law, while expounding an obscure biblical verse whose very obscurity invited bold speculation. Yet for all the extravagance of his interpretation, Rabbi Akiva does not yet draw any distinction between God and the *Shekhinah*, as this mishnaic utterance clearly shows.

Other statements and exegeses, which were subsequently given an entirely new meaning in light of Kabbalistic linguistic usage, did not have this specific tone in their original context. "There is no place that is empty of the *Shekhinah*, not even the thornbush,"¹³ stated in connection with the divine revelation from the burning bush, simply means that God can manifest Himself everywhere—even in the lowliest thing, such as a briar. Here too, the *Shekhinah* is nothing other than God's presence, without any further qualification.

But it is quite understandable that this omnipresence of God would be interpreted in a nonliteral fashion as one of His qualities, similar to His mercifulness or His strictness. It is difficult to unambiguously state when and where this significant change came about in ancient Jewish literature. Some scholars, such as Abelson, and to some extent Goldberg, have felt that certain talmudic passages in which God Himself speaks of "My *Shekhinah*" (as in "I remove my *Shekhinah* from among them") force the reader to construe the *Shekhinah* as a distinct quality of God's.¹⁴ But this seems to me by no means certain; this phrase may also simply mean "My presence." One can definitely say that in all the passages analyzed by Abelson the *Shekhinah* never appears opposite God, and nowhere in the ancient exoteric aggadah does it speak of "God and His *Shekhinah*," as two distinct entities. God frequently speaks about the *Shekhinah*, but never to it; never does the expression "I and My *Shekhinah*" appear. The notion of the *Shekhinah* as appearing next to God and at His side is simply inconceivable to the ancient aggadists. We should also add at this point that, to the best of our knowledge, the aggadic figure of the *Shekhinah* is never identified with or associated with Divine Wisdom (*Sophia*). Thus, when O. S. Rankin states that the *Shekhinah* is "a kindred figure to wisdom,"¹⁵ this holds true only for the much later Kabbalistic symbol of the *Shekhinah*, which we shall study below, never for the ancient rabbinic sources.

We can nevertheless state that, already in the world of aggadic thought, the personification of the *Shekhinah* advanced quite far in several directions. Among those passages whose texts can be fairly and uncontestedly established, that which goes furthest is the description in *Lamentations Rabbah*:

When the *Shekhinah* left the Holy Temple [after its destruction], she turned around and embraced and kissed the walls and columns of the Temple, wept and said: "Greetings to you, house of my holiness; Greetings to you, house of my kingship; greetings to you, house of my glory; greetings to you, from now on, peace be with you."¹⁶

But even here, there is no personification of a female figure, but only an admittedly bold personification of God's presence. This is clearly shown by the preceding allegory, in which the *Shekhinah* in this dismal state is compared, not to a princess or to a queen, but to a king, as these sources always do whenever they allegorize about God. Not once does this older literature ever really liken the *Shekhinah* to a woman.

The personification would be even sharper in another passage—one frequently quoted in later Jewish literature—could we be certain that the text is correct (itself a highly controversial point). This mishnaic passage¹⁷ concerns those sentenced to execution and God's commiseration with the torments of the criminal about to be hanged: "When a human being suffers torment, what does the *Shekhinah* say? 'My head is heavy, my arm is heavy.'" Unfortunately for this theory, several important early manuscripts and numerous quotations lack here the decisive word *Shekhinah*, and what eventually became a widely known epigram as the utterance of the *Shekhinah* may have originally been merely a proverbial expression of the human feeling of suffering, which God makes his own.¹⁸

But as early as the talmudic period, Jewish linguistic usage concerning the *Shekhinah* left room for transition to a Gnostic hypostasis—one never documented in any Jewish sources of that period. In this Gnostic usage the *Shekhinah* appears as a separate hypostasis, albeit an ethereal one that dissolves in vagueness. This appears more clearly in Mandaean literature, in which the *Shekhinah* is spoken of in the plural. Only once does the

Talmud mention a plurality of *Shekhinahs*, and that in an ironic sense and a polemical context: "A heretic [the emperor?] asked Rabban Gamaliel: '[You Jews claim that] the *Shekhinah* is present in every gathering of ten. How many *Shekhinahs* [Aramaic, *shekhinata*] are present? How many *Shekhinahs* exist?!' "¹⁹ The Mandaeans, however, unhesitatingly went along with this pluralistic rendering of the *Shekhinah*, which necessarily distinguishes it from the supreme God, just as they used many other terms from religious language. Their literature repeatedly speaks about myriads upon myriads of worlds, treasure-houses of riches (*Uthras*, more or less equivalent to *thesauroi*), and *Shekhinahs*, without ever pinpointing the meaning of this latter concept. These *Shekhinahs* are evidently palaces or dwellings of light, themselves brilliant, but without any obvious function in the Mandaean pantheon.

On the other hand, in the writings of those Gnostics and mystics who remained within the framework of rabbinic Judaism, and in the literature of the *Hekhaloth* and the *Merkavah* school, the term *Shekhinah* is used no differently than in the contemporary aggadah. These esoterics, the direct heirs of the ancient apocalyptic literature, likewise adopted their overall linguistic usage, in which the *Shekhinah* was to a large extent identified with the glory of God. The *Merkavah* world is the place of "His *Shekhinah*, which is hidden from human beings in the supernal heights."²⁰ Instead of the standard talmudic term "throne of glory," these writings speak of the "throne of the *Shekhinah*"—that is, the hidden *Shekhinah* is revealed here to the *Merkavah* initiate at the height of his vision.²¹ From this *Shekhinah*, seated on the throne, there emanates a voice that speaks to the lower beings.²² All this strikes me as comprehensible within the context of the above-mentioned conception, which identifies the *Shekhinah* with God Himself, such that there is no need to assume any further developments here. The subject of the anthropomorphic descriptions of the Godhead found in the extant *Shi'ur Komah* fragments is the Creator God (*Yotser Bereshith*), the Demiurge. In other versions, however, the subject of the *Merkavah* visionaries is designated as the "Body of the *Shekhinah*."²³ Here, too, there is still no clear difference between God and the *Shekhinah*; the latter is not an independent personification of one of His qualities. But perhaps there is already some Gnostic distinction between the hidden

essence of God and His revealed image, which appears to the prophets and the *Merkavah* mystics (albeit that image in itself is likewise hidden from human eyes). The voice emanating from the *Shekhinah* does not speak upward to God but, as in all other such passages, to His creatures alone.

A crucial new development begins in the latest stratum of the midrash as we know it. In a passage overlooked, oddly enough, by Abelson and other scholars, the midrash on Proverbs 22:29 speaks of the *Shekhinah* for the first time as facing not only human beings but God Himself!

When the Sanhedrin wished to designate him [King Solomon] along with three kings and four private individuals [as ones who have no share in the World to Come], the *Shekhinah* stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, and spoke to Him: "Lord of the Worlds! 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business?' [Prov. 22:29]—they wish to count him [Solomon] among the darklings [i.e., those to be damned]." At that moment a heavenly voice went out and said, "'He shall stand before kings' [ibid.]—and he shall not stand before darklings."²⁴

This is the first time that a clear division is drawn between God and the *Shekhinah*, in which the two of them face one another in dialogue. Indeed, during the twelfth century, Judah he-Hasid of Regensburg had given an even bolder reading of this text: "The *Shekhinah* threw herself down before the Holy One blessed be He." It is surely not surprising that R. Moses Taku was shocked by these passages when he cited them in the early thirteenth century,²⁵ noting correctly that this passage, so crucial for us, does not appear in the Talmud or in the older aggadic works. Indeed, we can see how the talmudic statement was transposed from its originally innocent context to that of the *Shekhinah*. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 104b), without mentioning Solomon's name, tells us:

They wished to include one more [i.e., Solomon]. The image of his father [David] came and threw itself down before them, but they ignored it. . . . Fire descended from heaven and lapped around their

benches, and they paid no heed of it. A heavenly voice came forth and said to them, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" [Prov. 22:29].

The variant found in the later midrash, which is alien to the parallel ancient passages, could only have emerged after the *Shekhinah* had already been hypostatized as a quality of God, by groups of unknown later aggadists. In light of the strong tendency of the midrash on Proverbs to lean heavily on anthropomorphic *Merkavah* mysticism, we cannot assume that this variant was due solely to the speculations of medieval Jewish philosophers.

We find similar points of transition in other passages, although the exact reading in those cases is uncertain and needs further study. In *Midrash Kohen*, a work composed of various fragments from the "Acts of Creation" literature, and whose first section contains unknown speculations from another source concerning Wisdom, we find an interpretation of the verse, "and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). The author begins by mentioning various activities of God, and continues:

What did He do? He took a name from the Torah and opened it, and took from it another Name, which has not been conveyed to any person . . . and poured and sprinkled three drops into the sea, and it was completely filled with water, and the Holy Spirit and the Holy *Shekhinah* (*Shekhinah ha-Kodesh*) hovered and blew over it.²⁶

On the same page we read: "The Holy One, blessed be He, began to stand in the light, and His *Shekhinah* was in the upper realms." It is not at all clear whether a distinction is drawn here between these two concepts. As far as I know, the term "His Holy *Shekhinah*" does not appear in any other early texts; it would be worthwhile examining the extant manuscripts of *Midrash Kohen*.²⁷

In *Pesikta Rabbati*,²⁸ following the well-known statement "When Israel went into Exile, the *Shekhinah* was also exiled with them," we hear the following complaint of the angels: "The angels said to Him: 'Your Glory

is in its place; do not abase Your *Shekhinah*!’ ” But again, the continuation of this statement does not suggest any distinction between God and His *Shekhinah*.

In *Targum Jonathan* to the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy 31:3–8, a nearly identical expression is repeated three times, in a rather surprising manner. In verse 3, “The Lord thy God, He will go over before thee,” the Targum reads: “The Lord your God and His *Shekhinah* go before you,” while in verse 6, “For the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee,” the Targum reads, “because the Lord your God, His *Shekhinah* speaks before thee.” Likewise, in verse 8, “the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee,” is translated, “And the word of the Lord, His *Shekhinah*, speaks before you.”

In fact, in medieval Jewish philosophy, the *Shekhinah* clearly appears as a manifestation of God, quite distinct from God Himself. In keeping with the rationalistic tendency to assure a pristine monotheism, which dominated medieval Jewish philosophy, this hypostasis, although sharply distinguishable from God, assumes a character that is still a far cry from the Kabbalistic understanding of it. All philosophers, from Saadiah Gaon through Judah Halevi to Maimonides, unanimously agree that the *Shekhinah*, which is for them identical with the biblical concept of God’s glory, is a freely willed creation of God’s. Even if it is His first creation, and far more sublime than any grossly material creation, as a created being it has no part in the divine essence or unity. The divine glory is a “created form” made by the Creator in order

that this light would give his prophet the assurance of the authenticity of what has been revealed to him . . . it is a more sublime form than that of the angels, more enormous in its creation, bearing splendor and light, and is called “the *Kavod* of God” [in the Bible] . . . and *Shekhinah* in the rabbinic tradition.²⁹

Henceforth, as has been correctly stated,³⁰ this theory constituted a basic tenet of the philosophical exegesis of the Bible. This primordial light is explicitly defined as the first of all created things by Judah ben Barzillai

al-Bargeloni, writing shortly before the emergence of the early Kabbalah in Provence. He states:

When the thought arose in God of creating a world, He first created the Holy Spirit, to be a sign of His divinity, which was seen by the prophets and the angels. And He created the image of the Throne of His Glory, to be a throne for the Holy Spirit, called the Glory of our God, which is a radiant brilliance and a great light that shines upon all His other creatures. And that great light is called the Glory of our God, blessed be His Name. . . . And the Sages call this great light *Shekhinah*. . . . And no creature can behold this great light in its primal existence, whether an angel or a seraph or a prophet, because of its great power at the beginning. And were a prophet to behold it, his soul would immediately separate itself from his body and he would die. . . . For any “seeing” that is spoken of regarding an angel or a prophet, concerning this created light that the Holy One blessed be He created, that he showed to the angels or prophets, refers to the Holy One blessed be He showing them the end [or “back”] of that light to whom He wishes, but no man can see the beginning of the primordial light and the content of his glory and the image of his brilliance.³¹

Judah Halevi likewise believes that the *Shekhinah* (i.e., the divine glory) is a “fine substance that follows the will of God, assuming any form God wishes to show to the prophet,” and therefore ipso facto creaturely.³² Maimonides likewise speaks of the *Shekhinah* as the “created light, that God caused to descend in a particular place in order to confer honor upon it in a miraculous way.”³³

These respected authors could hardly have ignored the fact that this conception of the *Shekhinah* as a being completely separate from God was entirely alien to the talmudic texts, and could only be made compatible with them by means of extremely forced interpretation of these texts. Nevertheless, these philosophers preferred “cutting the Gordian knot” in this way rather than endanger the purity of monotheistic belief by recognizing an uncreated hypostasis. Nevertheless—with the exception of Judah ben Barzillai—these philosophers avoided applying their new

principle to concrete exegesis of talmudic passages about the *Shekhinah*. As for the female character of the *Shekhinah*, nowhere do they say anything about it.

The Kabbalists never tired subsequently of protesting against this philosophical doctrine of the *Shekhinah*. Even Abraham Miguel Cardozo, the great representative of the heretical Sabbatian Kabbalah, rebukes the Jewish philosophers soundly; he says that when the Messiah comes, they will be made to answer for this theory, which obscured or even ruined true knowledge of God during the time of Exile by separating the *Shekhinah* from the realm of the Godhead!

Another passage from a very late midrash indicates that such a division between God and the *Shekhinah* was envisaged in southern France during the eleventh century, long before the emergence of the Kabbalah. This midrash, which has been overlooked in earlier discussions of the subject, appears in *Bereshith Rabbati* by R. Moses ha-Darshan of Narbonne: "Rabbi Akiva said: When the Holy One blessed be He contemplated the deeds of the generation [of Enoch] and saw that they were corrupt and evil, He withdrew Himself and His *Shekhinah* from their midst."³⁴ This is a nearly verbatim paraphrase of a passage from the pseudepigraphic *Othi'oth de-Rabbi 'Akiva*, which says only, "I removed my *Shekhinah* from among them."³⁵ Clearly, for the later writer it is possible to distinguish between God's Self and His *Shekhinah*. This is consistent with the above-mentioned midrash on Proverbs. However, the source of Moses ha-Darshan's statement may be Oriental, as indicated by the late addendum to *Othi'oth de-Rabbi 'Akiva*. In this addendum, which most likely also derives from the Orient, we find the same distinction drawn: "At that hour, the Holy One blessed be He looked and beheld His Throne and His *Kavod* and His *Shekhinah*."³⁶ On the other hand, the Rabbi of Narbonne already shows the influence of the philosophical exegesis. In another passage he states that the angels were created from the "brilliance of the *Shekhinah*." In the older literature this term appears only in connection with theophanies or eschatological visions; here it is understood as the primal matter of Creation—a reading more consistent with the philosophical speculation that emerged during the ninth and tenth centuries than with the prephilosophical aggadah.

There may be a hint of criticism aimed at the frequency of hypostatizations in the aggadah itself in a passage from the thirteenth-century Yemenite compilation known as *Midrash ha-Gadol*. The passage, itself relatively late (eighth to tenth century?), reads as follows:

“And they saw the God of Israel . . .” [Exod. 24:10] Rabbi Eleazar said: Whoever translates a verse literally is a liar, and whoever adds to it commits blasphemy. Thus, one who translates the verse, “and they saw the God of Israel” literally is a liar, for the Holy One, blessed be He, sees but is never seen. But one who translates, ‘and they saw the glory of the *Shekhinah* of the God of Israel’ blasphemes, for he is constructing here a trinity: the Glory, the *Shekhinah*, and God.³⁷

The translation of Exodus 24:10 criticized here appears in one of the ancient Palestinian paraphrases, extant in manuscript, the so-called Fragment Targum.³⁸ The objection to the possible trinitarian exploitation of this paraphrase is admittedly rather farfetched; nevertheless, it is evident from this that such groupings of hypostatized appellatives for God could be regarded as dogmatically questionable, even before the emergence of the Kabbalah. It is also clear that the author of this critique knew nothing of the philosophical downgrading of the *Shekhinah* to a created being.

IV

The *Shekhinah* appears in an altogether different light in the earliest sources of the Kabbalah, in which, albeit in a halting and clumsy manner, a new concept of the Godhead begins to be developed. To be sure, this new concept often takes up old themes of the rabbinic tradition, combining them rather peculiarly into a new understanding, reinterpreting them, and placing them in unexpected contexts. The *Shekhinah* thereby acquires a new meaning, of paramount importance for the vision of the early Kabbalah; here we shall explore at least the essential elements of this new meaning.

It is not merely chance that the clearest contribution to the new understanding of the *Shekhinah* appears in those texts that contain the most decisive breakthrough of mythical consciousness into the sphere of rabbinic Judaism (albeit in very different ways): namely, *Sefer ha-Bahir* and *Sefer ha-Zohar*. The *Bahir* is a collection of short fragments, remnants, and reworkings of ancient fragments originating in Oriental gnosis, as well as fragments of theosophic aggadah. On the basis of philological analysis, the *Bahir* can hardly be ascribed to a single author. In the *Zohar*, on the other hand, we confront a document of an astonishingly personal character. In this book we see the breakthrough of the mythic unconscious in the soul of an author of considerable literary talent; this individual took the esoteric tradition of more than a century of intense Kabbalistic development, recast it in an unusually personal manner, and succeeded in transmitting these very personal images to posterity. Of course, this was possible only because later generations were intrigued by something that so obstinately and resolutely demanded its right to exist within the precincts of Judaism, without relinquishing its own essentially mythical character.

The essence of the Kabbalistic idea of God, as we have already stated, lies in its resolutely dynamic conception of the Godhead: God's creative power and vitality develop in an unending movement of His nature, which flows not only outward into Creation but also back into itself. Obviously, a fundamental contradiction was bound to arise between, on the one hand, this dynamic conception, which sought and found God's unity precisely in the secret life of His nature and, on the other hand, the Jewish tradition. After all, God's immutability and "unmovedness" was one of the bases upon which the prophetic perception of God seemed to coincide with the Aristotelian doctrine of the "unmoved Mover." In any event, the concept of an unchanging God had long since enjoyed a position in the foreground of Jewish monotheistic belief, and was particularly accentuated in the rationalistic formulations of Jewish theology by the Jewish-Arabic philosophers. The popular utterances of scholars and pious men, however, did not always meet the rigorous demands of precise formulation, in which there is no room for misunderstanding; on occasion, they even expressed opposition to the severity of this formulation,

although this opposition did not take place as part of an explicit and conscious effort to crystallize their views. It was precisely this that made the utterances of the Kabbalists so provocative: they gave shape to all that was nonconformist when speaking about God. Moreover, during the period of hegemony of Aristotelian philosophy, they did not have at their disposal a conceptual apparatus capable of formulating their intuitions and visions of God. The only language available in this sphere was one that opposed everything the Kabbalists wanted to say. Thus, they often enough found themselves helplessly entangled in a net of contradictions between the rigid and undialectical concepts that they, as men of their time, had to use, and the images and symbols that lived within them, that they had brought to life but could not adequately express in the terminology imposed upon them by their adversaries.

Hence, the Kabbalists resorted to the expedient of differentiating between two strata of the Godhead: one, its hidden being-in-itself, its immanence in the depths of its own being; and another, that of its creative and active nature, thrusting outward toward expression. The former is indeed lacking in all motion or change and may be described or, better, circumscribed in negative terms, following the concepts of traditional philosophical theologians. The other stratum is the dynamic aspect of infinite life, of potencies in which the process of God's creative and world-maintaining activities are realized. The former stratum is designated in the language of the Kabbalists as *'Ein-Sof*, the undifferentiated unity, the self-contained Root of Roots in which all contradictions merge and dissolve. The latter stratum is the structure of the ten *Sefiroth*, which are the sacred names—i.e., the various aspects of God—or the ten words of Creation (*logoi*) by which everything was created. One can indeed say about this world, in contradiction to the dogmatic dictum of the theologians: "But it does turn!"

'Ein-Sof is only seldom conceived of as energy or power;³⁹ It (in the spirit of the Kabbalists, one should use the neuter gender) is purely and simply concealed and transcendent; no statement can be made about It. However, the *Sefiroth*, while part of the divine essence (albeit as stages of His revelation, aspects of His nature through which He manifests Himself to us), are primarily bearers of His active and creative force. The word

“forces” (*koah*), found so often in Kabbalistic writings, is not to be construed in the sense of the medieval distinction between *actus* and *potentia*; the *Sefiroth* are not merely potentialities, but are real, existence beings. They are hypostases that have become independent; charged with and emanating energy, they empower and advance the process by which God reveals Himself and makes His great name known. In line with this, *Sefer ha-Bahir* refers to the *Sefiroth* as “kings,” in whom the one and only hidden King manifests Himself; they are also called “voices,” through which the one ineffable word, the holy name, spoken not only in the Torah but in all of Creation, is given expression.

In this world of *Sefiroth*, each of which can be viewed as a hypostasis of a particular facet of God, the *Shekhinah* receives its new meaning as the tenth and final *Sefirah*. The crucial factor in its new status is unquestionably its feminine character, which, as mentioned above, is not found in any pre-Kabbalistic source, but which now absorbs everything capable of such an interpretation in biblical and rabbinic literature. This presentation of the *Shekhinah* as female element—simultaneously mother, bride, and daughter—within the structure of the Godhead constitutes a very meaningful step, with far-reaching consequences, one which the Kabbalists attempted to justify by Gnostic interpretation. It is not surprising that the opponents of Kabbalah reacted to this idea with great suspicion. The enormous popularity enjoyed by this new mythic understanding of the concept is illustrated precisely by the fact that it filtered down in the form of confused, apologetic distortions in which the *Shekhinah* was identified and compared with the Divine Providence itself. This fact is undisputable proof that the Kabbalists here touched upon a fundamental and primal need, uncovering one of the perennial religious images latent in Judaism as well.

There are two ways of explaining the emergence of the female *Shekhinah*. One possibility is that, when these ideas were originally conceived, the final *Sefirah* was already conceived as a vessel receiving all the other *Sefiroth*; it was consequently understood by the Kabbalistic mind as a feminine element, and hence naturally drew to itself the female symbols present in religious language. The other possibility leads us in a different direction. When the medieval Jewish Gnostics took the decisive step of

identifying the *Shekhinah* and *Kenesseth Yisra'el*—two hypostases that had thus far been distinct in the rabbinic tradition—this necessarily triggered an eruption of the feminine into the sphere of the Godhead; the rest followed automatically. The state of our earliest extant texts does not allow us to choose between these alternatives—if, indeed, these are mutually exclusive. The former view is based upon a psychological assumption that precedes the exegeses in which it is confirmed: namely, that when the image of the Great Mother resurged, it found itself appropriate Jewish symbols. The second alternative, by contrast, takes as its point of departure a certain historical statement: because a powerful national symbol, the Congregation of Israel (*Kenesseth Yisra'el*), was incorporated within a new, dynamic conception of the Godhead (perhaps as a result of the profound shock caused by the persecutions associated with the Crusades, or perhaps far earlier, under Gnostic influence); and because *Kenesseth Yisra'el* itself was understood as constituting the body of the *Shekhinah*, in which and through which the *Shekhinah* acts and suffers together with the people of Israel (perhaps somewhat parallel to Christianity's notion of the Church as *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ)—because of these factors, the archetypal, primordial image of the female took shape, its resurgence being rooted in these specific historical experiences. But this explanation presupposes that no vestiges of premedieval Gnostic thinking remain in the pertinent fragments of *Bahir*—even though such a possibility, as far as I can judge, is imposed upon us by a philological analysis of the work. In any event, *Sefer ha-Bahir* (and we have no older extant Kabbalistic texts) already contains a crystallized symbolic system. Furthermore, it may well be that there is a basis in historical reality for both explanations, and that they need not exclude one another. Touching upon this topic elsewhere,⁴⁰ I have already expressed my doubts as to whether we can say anything meaningful concerning the question as to which of the two factors in the birth of a new conception of the *Shekhinah* was primary, the historical or the psychological: i.e., the exegetical identification of *Kenesseth Yisra'el* with the *Shekhinah*, or the resurgence of the idea of the feminine within the Godhead in the hearts of the earliest Kabbalists. But I must admit that, if we knew more about the historical circumstances of the origins of the Kabbalah, we might

have less need of the psychologists, even though their contribution in this area is not to be denigrated. In any event, one may state that the decisive step in the emergence of the Kabbalistic theosophy was the unique intertwining of these two processes.

The character of the *Shekhinah* as a female principle, as one of the *middoth* or qualities of God, is entirely consistent in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, although we cannot expect systematic uniformity among all of the highly disparate fragments scattered throughout the book. In all of the portrayals of the *Shekhinah*, both direct and in parables, one thing stands out: several of these parables (appearing precisely at the most fundamental points), which seem to be of strikingly Gnostic character, are in fact no more than conscious reworkings of parables found in rabbinic sources, where they appear in utterly innocuous contexts, remote from any Gnosticism. Thus, in an early midrash,⁴¹ we read:

A parable is told about a king who entered a certain land and issued an edict, saying: "Whatever lodgers are staying here may not see my face until they have first seen the face of the Matrona [i.e., the queen]." Likewise, the Holy One blessed be He speaks thus: "Do not bring before Me a sacrifice until one Sabbath has passed."

This parable about the Sabbath,⁴² which is also compared to a princess in other texts, appears in a highly interesting passage of the *Bahir* (S §43; M §63), in which the bride mentioned in the Song of Songs is compared to a "field" and a "chest"—that is, vessels into which the upper *Sefirot* flow. She is also the "heart" of the Godhead; the author expounds the numerical value of the Hebrew *lev* (heart), thirty-two, as corresponding to the thirty-two paths of wisdom with which the world was created, according to *Sefer Yetsirah*, which tells the following parable in this connection:

This is like a king who was in the innermost chamber of his apartments, and the number of rooms was thirty-two, and there was a path to every room. Did it behoove the king to allow everyone to enter his rooms by these paths? No! But did it behoove him not to

show his pearls and jeweled settings and hidden treasures and beautiful things at all? No! What did the king do? He took his daughter and concentrated all paths in her and in her garments [i.e., her manifestation], and he who wishes to enter the interior must look at her. And she was married to a king, and she was given to him as a gift. At times, in his great love for her, he calls her “my sister,” for they come from one place; sometimes he calls her “my daughter,” for she is his daughter; and sometimes he calls her “my mother.”

The concluding sentence of this interesting passage, which expresses a clear concept of the function of the last *Sefirah*, is taken from an older midrash, in which the “Community of Israel” is identified with the bride in the Song of Songs:

This is compared to a king who had an only daughter, whom he loved very greatly and would call “my daughter.” And he did not leave his love for her until he called her “my sister.” And did not leave his love for her until he called her “my mother.”⁴³

We find here the most significant imagery of the symbolism of the feminine gathered in one piece. Only one thing is lacking: except for a single passage, (S §90; M §131), *Sefer ha-Bahir* avoids referring to the daughter as wife. The explicitly sexual sphere of female symbolism is here quite clearly and visibly rejected, certainly not by chance; otherwise, all of the essential motifs are expressed here. The daughter actually has little of her own: she is merely the totality of the paths that lead to her, the vessel that gathers them, the robe on which the jewels appear. But as such, she is the medium through which it is possible to reach the king himself.

This “daughter” is clearly identical with the “lower *Hokhmah*,” known in *Bahir* as “the wisdom of Solomon”; it stands at the end of the divine pleroma, being at once both above and below. All this is clearly stated in another passage (S §44; M §65):

What wisdom did the Holy One blessed be He give to Solomon? Solomon bore the name of the Holy One, as is said [in the talmudic tradition]: “Every ‘Solomon’ mentioned in the Song of Songs is holy [i.e., refers to God], save one. The Holy One blessed be He says: “Because your name is like the name of My Glory, I wish to wed my daughter to thee.” And is she married? Rather, he gave her to him as a gift, as is written: “And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom” [1 Kings 5:26].

The final *Sefirah* descends to the earthly realm in the guise of the *Shekhinah* mentioned in the Talmud and the “Wisdom” of the Bible. She is no longer merely God’s presence, but is now a specific factor in His self-manifestation.

A similar line of thought appears in the exegesis of the first letter of the Torah, *beth*, as a symbol of the lower wisdom:

What is its function? It is comparable to a king who had a daughter who was good and comely, graceful and perfect. And he married her to a prince, and gave her garments and a crown and jewelry and great wealth. Can the king live without his daughter? No! But can he be with her all day long? No! What did he do? He built a window between himself and her, and whenever the daughter needs the father and the father the daughter, they join one another through the window. Of this is it written: “All glorious is the king’s daughter within the palace; her raiment is interwoven with gold” [Ps. 45:14].⁴⁴

The king’s daughter here dwells below, in the corporeal world, but remains connected with her father by means of a “window.” What she has is “within,” deriving from the upper world and fundamentally within it. In brief, what characterizes the *Shekhinah* is her transitional position between transcendence and immanence. Here, as in the previously mentioned passages, she has purely feminine characteristics, and must be adorned and presented with gifts in order to have something of her own. Our author is fond of this image of gifts of jewelry and wealth, to which

he returns repeatedly rather than employ images of conjugality and impregnation.

Nevertheless, the *Shekhinah* is not always thought of as purely receptive and passive. This comes out very clearly in the one passage in the *Bahir* where she appears as a “king”:

He was asked by his disciples: What does the letter *dalet* mean? He replied with a parable: There were once ten kings in a certain place, all of whom were rich; but one of them was not so rich as the others. Hence, even though his wealth was great, he was called poor (*dal*) in relation to the others. [S §19; M §27]

The *Shekhinah* is not utterly poor and destitute; she has some wealth, a positive strength of her own. The problem raised here concerns the relationship between active and passive elements in the *Shekhinah*—a problem that was henceforth to occupy the Kabbalists for quite some time—as we shall see, for a long time. *Sefer ha-Bahir* never defines the nature of this positive property of the *Shekhinah*. In some fragments, which may come from a different source-stratum of the Kabbalah, the passive, receptive quality is so strongly emphasized that the question does not even arise.

The significant point for our discussion is that the king’s daughter, in those *Bahir* fragments that seem to be the oldest, occupies a position analogous to that of the “soul” in Gnostic thought. What the Gnostics say about psyche is stated in the *Bahir* about the *Shekhinah*. In one very strange passage (S §36; M §53), we can even find some traces of this Gnostic connection, which does not really fit later Kabbalistic doctrine:

Why is it called *zahav* [gold]? Because it includes three principles—the male, which is [the letter] *zayin*; the soul, which is [the letter] *heh* . . . and [the letter] *beth* is their existence, as is said, “In the beginning God created . . .” [Gen. 1:1].

The unified existence of both letters within the letter *beth*—which is the first letter of the Torah—is clearly understood here as the union of male

and female, which is evidently regarded here as the primal act of Creation. While in the very next passage (already discussed above) the female principle is clearly designated as the princess, in the present text the “soul” appears instead of the princess!

We find other Gnostic themes parallel to this passage, in which images of the psyche are applied to the *Shekhinah*. In this context the most interesting, and oddest, fragment is probably *Bahir*, S §90 (M §§130–133, with corrections based upon MS. München 209), containing three parables I would like to quote *in extenso*:

What is meant by “The whole earth is full of His glory” [Isa. 6:3]? That the entire land [*erets*; also “earth”] that was created on the first day, which corresponds above to the Land of Israel, is full of the glory of God. And what is it [this earth or this glory]? Wisdom, of which it is written, “The wise shall inherit honor” [or “glory”; Prov. 3:35]; and it is also said: “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place” [Ezek. 3:12].

And what is “the glory of the Lord”? A parable: This matter is comparable to a king in whose room the queen was, and all his hosts delighted in her, and she had sons, who came every day to see the king and who blessed him. They said to him: “Where is our mother?” He said to them: “You cannot see her now.” They said: “Blessings to her, wherever she is!”

And what is meant by “from His place”? Because there is no one who knows His place. A parable: There was a king’s daughter who came from a faraway place and no one knew whence she had come, until they saw that she was capable, beautiful, and excellent in everything she did. They then said: “She is certainly taken from the form of light [or “the side of light”], as her deeds brighten the world. They asked her: “From whence have you come?” She said: “From my place.” They said: “If so, the people of her place must be great. Blessed be she and blessed be her place!”

But is not this glory of the Lord one of His hosts? Did He not take it away from them? Why then do we praise it [as if it were something separate or distinct]?⁴⁵ A parable: This is comparable to

a man who had a beautiful garden and, outside of the garden, close to it, a stretch of good field. He made a beautiful garden therein, watering the garden first, so that the water spread over the entire garden, but not over that stretch of field, which was not adjacent, even though it was all one. Therefore, he opened a place for it and watered it separately.

This passage, with its almost palpably Gnostic language, is surely one of the most suggestive and revealing fragments for understanding the change wrought by Kabbalah in the concept of the *Shekhinah*. If we connect this passage with those quoted above, we find that the *Bahir* quite directly identifies the divine glory, the *Kavod*, with the “lower wisdom,” which is identical to the “supernal earth”—that is, the *Shekhinah*, which is at the border of the supernal world. It is at once hidden and visible, according to the phases and stages of its appearance. Only once in the *Bahir* (S §139; M §198) is the *Shekhinah* represented by lunar symbolism; in the present passage this situation is illustrated by other images, as in the first parable above, in which she is manifest as a queen, *matronitha*, who is hidden in her apartments and whom everyone nevertheless seeks. Yet she is also the daughter of the king, come to our world as a strange guest from a faraway place. She comes from the place of light or even, as the strange variant puts it, from the “form of light she was taken.” She shines her light into the lower world and even dwells within it. *Sefer ha-Bahir* does not call this an exile of the *Shekhinah*—such a notion is not really developed in this book—but rather seems to imply that it is her destiny to dwell in the lower realms.

Another passage (S §§97–98; M §147) states that the *Shekhinah* is the principle or essence of this world, and that it is “the brilliance taken from the primal light,” which is “the good light stored away for the righteous.” God has taken this brilliance and “incorporated within it the thirty-two paths of wisdom, and given them to this world.” Thus, the secret law of the *Shekhinah*, which is equated with the Oral Law—that is, the mystical substance of tradition—rules in this world.

The third parable defines the *Shekhinah*’s status through the paradox

of the piece of field that is not contingent to the garden—i.e., the other *Sefiroth* or plantings of God—“even though everything is one.” The last *Sefirah* performs a different function from all the other *Sefiroth*: it is one with all the others and yet separate, because it performs a mission on their behalf to the world, like a princess coming from afar. One cannot help but recall the Gnostic hymns about the bride who is “the daughter of light, upon whom rises the radiance of kings, whose appearance is sublime and filled with charm and grace, and who is adorned with the beauty of purity,”⁴⁶ or of the other hymn that became famous as the “Song of the Soul.” Is it not astonishing that the “daughter of light,” in the Gnostic bridal hymn about Wisdom, is likewise praised with thirty-two potencies⁴⁷—even if she did not originally contain the thirty-two within herself? And does it not give us food for thought to find that in Syrian Gnosticism the “daughter of light” is the second, lower wisdom, at the edge of the *pleroma* (the realm of “fullness” of the aeons), just as in *Sefer ha-Bahir* the daughter is the lower wisdom, the “wisdom of Solomon,” which has emanated from the supernal Sophia, the “Wisdom of God”?⁴⁸ Moreover, just as in Syrian and Armenian reworkings of these Gnostic hymns this Wisdom is associated with the Church, in early Kabbalah we find a similar process, whereby the “wisdom of Solomon” or lower wisdom is identified with *Kenesseth Yisra’el* and the *Shekhinah*.

The “daughter” is likewise the blessing that God has sent into the world. Particularly interesting is the passage in which this idea is proposed, through means of the conscious and deliberate transfer into the symbolic realm of an aggadah that is in no way Gnostic. In a rather bizarre talmudic passage it states that “Abraham had a daughter, whose name was *Ba-kol* (literally, “in everything” or “with everything”).⁴⁹ In the wake of this dictum the *Bahir* states:

[God] said: What shall I give him [Abraham] or what shall I do for him? I have made a lovely vessel, which contains precious jewels that are unparalleled, and are the gem of Kings.⁵⁰ I will give it to him, so that he may own it rather than I. Of this it is written, “And God blessed Abraham *with everything*” [Gen. 24:1]. [*Bahir*, S §52; M §78, with corrections based upon MS. München]

The *Bahir* has no doubts as to the essentially female nature of the *Shekhinah*; only rarely does it use neuter symbols for the *Shekhinah*. Its femininity is emphatically illustrated in a parable contrasting it with the masculine character of the other *Sefiroth*:

This is compared to a king who wished to plant nine male trees in his garden, all of which were palm trees. He said: "If they are all of the same gender, they cannot survive." What did he do? He planted an *ethrog* among them, among the nine that he had planned to be male. And what is an *ethrog*? An *ethrog* is female. (S §117; M §172)

We must emphasize one other element, which goes beyond what we have thus far seen concerning the symbolism of the tenth *Sefirah*: namely, the inner dynamics of the *Sefiroth* within themselves. The *Bahir* speaks, not only of the downward movement of the *Shekhinah* in its mission to earthly beings as Wisdom and daughter, but also of its upward movement. In an extremely bizarre parable in S §101 (M §152), we read:

This is compared to a king, who had a beautiful and fragrant vessel, which he loved very much. Sometimes he placed it on his head, that is, as the *tefillin* of one's head; sometimes he placed it on his arm, as the knot of the *tefillin* of one's arm; sometimes he loaned it to his son, that he might sit with it; and sometimes it was called his throne.

Even stranger—albeit instructive for the Gnostic character of these fragments—is the interpretation of one of the signs used for scriptural cantillation, the *zarka*, as a symbol for the *Shekhinah*:

What is the meaning of the *zarka*? It is like [the literal meaning] of its name, that it is "thrown" or "hurled" (*nizrak*). Like a thing that is hurled, and thereafter there comes the wealth of the kings and nations. [*Bahir*, S §61; M §89]

But this precious stone is not only thrown to the earth among the people⁵¹ who have cast it aside and rejected it (in the sense of “the stone which the builders rejected” [Ps. 118:22]);⁵² it also keeps “rising up to the very heights” (presumably during Israel’s prayer, although this is not stated clearly). Indeed, “it rises to that place from whence it was hewn”—that is, to the primal light of the supernal wisdom, from whence the *Shekhinah* emanated, if not to the place of the first *Sefirah* itself. Thus, we already find here the theme of the internal dynamics within the world of the *Sefiroth*, where the lowest *Sefirah* can rise up to the highest. Within the Godhead, there takes place a secret movement upward no less than downward, and it is the *Shekhinah* in particular that is the instrument of that motion.

But this ascent—in which that entity that exists on the border of the Godhead, on the verge of being hurled or rejected, is accepted and absorbed into the upmost reaches—is never viewed in *Sefer ha-Bahir* as a sacred marriage. At this stage Kabbalistic symbolism had not yet advanced that far—or should I say: returned full circle! To be sure, male and female are united in both the earthly and the celestial form of the human being (S §116; M §172), but no conclusions are drawn here from this. The interdependence of male and female is alluded to in at most indirect hints (as in S §§57–58; M §84–85). However, the *Bahir*’s restraint regarding this subject contrasts sharply with the extravagant sexual symbolism of the *Zohar*, to which we shall address ourselves below.

I have attempted to summarize and analyze here in some detail the premise notions about the tenth *Sefirah* found in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, due to the fundamental importance of this text as the earliest presentation of the ideas of this new school. Its true innovation lies in the fact that the *Shekhinah* no longer appears only in relation to the world and to the Jewish people—i.e., to created things—which was the only way in which it could be discussed in the earlier stages of development of this concept. In the *Bahir*, on the other hand, we find the first statements that portray the *Shekhinah* in the opposite direction—i.e., in the relation to God. The images used for this relationship in the *Bahir* appear in all their original freshness, whether they were taken from the legacy of Gnostic

speculation in late antiquity or whether they took shape in the course of the creative reflection of anonymous Jewish God-seekers of the twelfth century upon the meaning of the images of their own tradition. But whatever its historical origins, the breakthrough of a new attitude in terms of contents is heralded here and virtually takes place before our very eyes. What is most astounding about this attitude is the unabashed self-assurance with which this symbolism appears in the spiritual milieu of the twelfth century, within which this text must have been redacted in its extant form.

V

But we have thus far not yet discussed a subject that is essential for our understanding of the Kabbalistic notion of the *Shekhinah* from the early thirteenth century onward, one that, regarding a crucial point, goes beyond what has already been said—namely, the role of the *Shekhinah* as a mythical hypostasis of the divine immanence in the world. It was not for naught that the Kabbalists termed this phenomenon *ba-kol* (“in everything”). Its feminine character is marked from the outset by strongly passive and receptive traits, and it was not difficult to make the step from the intellectual world of the *Bahir* to a much more decisive theoretical formulation of this concept. Indeed, Spanish Kabbalah took such a step from an early date, certainly no later than 1200. Nowhere in the *Bahir* itself is it stated explicitly that the nine upper *Sefiroth* only operate in Creation through the intermediacy of the last *Sefirah*, that these potencies manifest themselves exclusively in this medium, and that they thereby permeate the purely receptive nature of the *Shekhinah* with their active drives. While these ideas are implied in some of the *Bahir* fragments discussed here, they were not clearly formulated. By contrast, they were clearly and explicitly stated in the subsequent literature, even prior to the *Zohar*, which received these views from that tradition.

This is illustrated, for example, in a very widely known text on the ten *Sefiroth* from the school of R. Moses Nahmanides of Gerona (1194–

1270)—one which indicates to what extent the colorful tone introduced by the *Zohar* into the image of the *Shekhinah* is still lacking here. For instance, the last *Sefirah* is described as follows:⁵³

The tenth *Sefirah*, called *Shekhinah*, is the crown. It receives from *Yesod* [the ninth *Sefirah*], and is alluded to in the language of *nun* [i.e., the feminine].⁵⁴ And it is [i.e., symbolized by] this world, for the guidance of this world is affected by [the pleroma] that comes to it from the *zayin* [i.e., the seven upper *Sefiroth*]. . . . And it is called “angel” and “the angel of God”⁵⁵ . . . for kingship [should read “angelic being”] flows from it. And it is called *Beth-El* [House of God], because it is the house of prayer; and it is the bride of the Song of Songs, who is called “daughter” and “sister”; and it is *Kenesseth Yisra’el* [literally, “Gathering of Israel”], in which everything is ingathered.⁵⁶ It is the supernal Jerusalem, and in prayers it is known as Zion [i.e., depiction, representation, emergence], for it is that in which all potencies are represented.⁵⁷ . . . All prohibitions of the Torah are rooted in it . . . therefore women are obligated to observe the negative commandments, for they derive from the same source.

The point of departure for the Zoharic images of the common origin of the “eternal feminine” is already formulated here. In a recurrent pun on the Hebrew root *kalal*, the *Shekhinah* is called *kalah ha-kelulah min ha-kol*, “the bride incorporated from everything,” who has no specific, positive potency of her own, beyond that from which she is constituted and with which she is crowned. (*Kalal* is likewise related to “crown,” as well as to “nuptials/bride” and “all.”) She is herself a pure “receptacle” (*keli*, often linked to the root *kalal* in a mystical etymology).

But this is not all that the Kabbalists have to say about the *Shekhinah* within the world of the ten *Sefiroth*. In their consciousness the *Shekhinah* was split into two potencies; this division has a very precise meaning in the dynamic understanding of the structure of the Sefirotic world, as elaborated more and more clearly and fully in thirteenth-century Kabbalah. In the following discussion we will attempt to determine the meaning of this split.

Although the Kabbalists claimed that this split is already clearly stated in the *Bahir*, this is by no means certain. The crucial sentence regarding this matter is subject to quite a different interpretation.

The disciples asked him [their teacher]: “We know [the order of the *Sefiroth*] from above to below, but we do not know from below to above.” . . . He sat and expounded to them: The *Shekhinah* is below as it is above.⁵⁸ And what is this *Shekhinah*? Let us say that it is the light that has emanated from the Primal Light, which is *Hokhmah*. And this [i.e., the emanated light] likewise surrounds everything, as is written, “the whole earth is filled with His glory” [Isa. 6:3]. And what does it do here? It is comparable to a king who had seven sons, and assigned to each one of them his place. He said to them: “Dwell one above the other.” The lowest one said: “I do not wish to live below and do not wish to be remote from you.” He said to them: “Behold, I go about and see you every day.” This is, “The whole earth is filled with His glory.” And why does He dwell among them? To maintain them and to sustain them. [*Bahir* S §116; M §171]

Scholars have always overlooked the fact that the first sentence in this fragment is none other than a quotation from an ancient cosmogonic midrash of the talmudic esoterics: “Just as His *Shekhinah* is above, so too is it below.”⁵⁹ That is, the same *Shekhinah* that appears in the transcendent world of the throne and the *Merkavah* is likewise that which fills the lower world. The sequel to the above-cited passage indicates that the *Bahir* also understood this sentence in that way, for only one *Shekhinah* is discussed. Unquestionably, however, the sentence could also be explained contrary to its original meaning: there is a *Shekhinah* above just as there is a *Shekhinah* below—that is, there are two manifestations of the *Shekhinah*. Such a reading of course presupposes that the image of a double *Shekhinah*, split into an upper and lower potency, was already present in the reader’s mind. The assumption that this misunderstanding originally stemmed from an erroneous reading of the sentence strikes me as too simplistic and superficial, particularly in light of the parallel material in the history of religions on the doubling of female potencies.

When did this change of interpretation take place? It appears, at the very latest, in a different stratum of the *Bahir* itself. In a certain passage (S §74; M §§104–105), the third *Sefirah*, known among the Kabbalists as *Binah*—and not the tenth—is unmistakably construed as “Mother of the Universe” and “[the divine] glory.” The seven *Sefiroth* are her children; characteristically, the book does not state that she gave birth to them, but that they were “the sons which she raised.” The third *Sefirah*, like the tenth, is known by the appellation of “glory,”⁶⁰ a title born by no other *Sefirah* in the *Bahir*. Compare with this the loose usage of many Spanish Kabbalists, who refer to all of the *Sefiroth* as God’s *Kavod*, His glory, and do not use it specifically of the *Shekhinah*.⁶¹

From the early thirteenth century, we find the two terms “upper *Shekhinah*” and “lower *Shekhinah*” used in a fixed, regular way.⁶² This Kabbalistic distinction is not to be identified with the twofold Sophia or Wisdom; supernal wisdom is the second *Sefirah*, *Hokhmah*, whose being in turn derives from the divine nothing or *Ennoia*, the uppermost *Sefirah*, whereas the upper *Shekhinah* is identified with *Binah*, in which the undifferentiated divine wisdom is made distinct and is separated out. In this respect, Gnostic and Kabbalistic symbolism widely diverge.

What is the meaning of this double *Shekhinah* within the framework of the dynamic unity of divine manifestations and emanations? Two conceptions of the principle of femininity are realized and expressed in these images. As the upper *Shekhinah* of the *Sefirah* of *Binah*, femininity is the full expression of ceaseless creative power—it is receptive, to be sure, but is spontaneously and incessantly transformed into an element that gives birth, as the stream of eternally flowing divine life enters into it. One might almost say, to use the terms of Indian religion, that the upper *Shekhinah* is the Shakti of the latent God; it is entirely active energy, in which what is concealed within God is externalized.

In the division of the Sefirotic world into the three upper and seven lower *Sefiroth*—a division generally accepted since *Sefer ha-Bahir*—the upper *Shekhinah* stands at the edge of the seven *Sefiroth* or seven primal days, emitting them from herself and realizing her strength in them (this is the inner, theogonic side of Creation!). In the same way, the lower *Shekhinah* stands at the edge of the external Creation, formed during the

temporal seven days of Creation. Insofar as each of the two *Shekhinahs* is, so to speak, the “mother” of one of the two aspects of the process of God’s self-manifestation or externalization (the esoteric and exoteric aspects, respectively), the two necessarily share many features in terms of this structure. But the difference between them is equally plain. The process of emanation, through which the Kabbalists represented their conception of God as an expanding life (one doubts whether the Neoplatonic image of emanation adequately expresses their actual intention), achieves its richest expression in *Binah*, the “upper mother,” while it ends in the “lower mother,” the final *Sefirah*.

That which flows out of *Binah* still belongs to the realm of Godhead, and is identical with God in His unfolding oneness. But this is not true of the lower *Shekhinah*: the divine potency in all its purity flows from it only back into itself; what emerges from the lower *Shekhinah* is no longer God, but Creation. This *Sefirah* can only receive the Divine, not transmit it. Thus, the active side of the female energy in God, the strength by which He eternally gives birth to Himself and emerges in His attributes as a personal God, is realized in the upper *Shekhinah*, while the passive side is realized as the lower *Shekhinah*.

This lower *Shekhinah* is designated as *Malkhuth*, “the Kingdom”—i.e., God’s dominion or power in the world. This term, based upon Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari* (II, 7, and IV, 3), became generally accepted from the time of its earliest appearance, shortly after the redaction of the *Bahir*, apparently in the writings of R. Isaac the Blind and his circle. This dominion is symbolically represented by the body of *Kenesseth Yisra’el*—“Israel forms the limbs of the *Shekhinah*,” says a later popular Kabbalistic epigram.⁶³ But although the lower *Shekhinah* is *Malkhuth*, it is no longer the king of this realm. The upper *Shekhinah*, in contrast, is often viewed as “king,” even in *Sefer ha-Zohar*.⁶⁴ The divine potency transmitted by the upper *Shekhinah* to the other *Sefirot* is of the same nature as that which it receives, but that which *Malkhuth* transmits to the lower world is of an entirely different, lower rank than that which it receives. The lower *Shekhinah* is “a mirror that is not transparent,” in which the abundant flow of divine light is broken and reflected; it is precisely this refraction that here becomes the Creation. Hence, the Spanish Kabbalah frequently re-

fers to the *Shekhinah*, in one of its two aspects, by the name *Yotser Bereshith*, Creator or Demiurge.⁶⁵ This male symbol represents that aspect of the feminine that is in principle denied to the lower *Shekhinah*. Hence, the upper *Shekhinah* is also known as “the Source of Life” and the “World to Come” (which is the true dimension of bliss in the Kabbalah), as well as “Return” (*Teshuvah*), because everything that began in it returns to it at the end—either because its energy has been fully consumed, or because the Creator, who radiated this energy, takes it back to Himself.⁶⁶ In addition to these symbols, which allude to the eschaton, the *Shekhinah* is also explicitly described as the sphere of redemption. As the lower mother, the *Shekhinah* is present in the cosmos in the work of Creation; as the upper mother, it constitutes the opportunity for the redemption of the world. In Kabbalistic terms, that place where Creation began as a process within God Himself is identical with the site of redemption and atonement. These ideas developed with particular vitality out of a Jewish consciousness and Jewish material, especially in R. Joseph Gikatilla’s *Sha‘arei Or*;⁶⁷ it would be incorrect to seek specifically Christian elements here.

But the idea of the lower *Shekhinah* is presented in the Kabbalah in an altogether different way. Symbols of abundance, fullness, and richness give way to symbols of deficiency and poverty. Already in the writings of the Kabbalistic school of Gerona, and more emphatically in the *Zohar* itself, the notion of the passive nature of the tenth *Sefirah* predominates. Night, moon, earth, dryness, the sabbatical year (i.e., of fallowness), gate, door—these are just a few of the most popular designations for the lower *Shekhinah*. It is described as a garden in which all plantings grow, as a pool fed by springs, as a sea into which the rivers flow, as a shrine and treasure-house in which the treasures of life and all the secrets of the Torah are kept—in these and a hundred other images, the lower *Shekhinah* is portrayed as the receptacle for all those potencies that combine within it to produce its positive form. “And all the candles [i.e., the *Sefiroth*] shine, and the lights are drawn and illuminate and join with one another, until the countenance of the Community of Israel is illuminated” (*Zohar*, II, 232b). In contrast to the third *Sefirah*, one can imagine a state in which these lights will not light up at all in the *Shekhinah*, or

only to a limited extent. The *Shekhinah*, one might say, is not itself the force, but rather the means of transmitting the force or the field in which the force spreads.

I would like to quote *in extenso* a passage from R. Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei Orah*, in which he describes the *Shekhinah* as the principle of perfection and unity in Creation before these were damaged by human sin but also as the object of the efforts of the patriarchs and of Israel to restore the lost harmony:⁶⁸

At times, this *middah* (attribute or quality) is called *Shekhinah*, for it has dwelt constantly with Israel since the making of the *mishkan* [Tent of Meeting], as it is written, "and let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" [Exod. 25:8]. Now take note of a great principle: know that in the beginning of the Creation of the world, the *Shekhinah* was primarily with the lower ones,⁶⁹ for the order of all creatures was arranged according to the hierarchy of the grades [*ma'aloth*; synonym for *Sefiroth*]⁷⁰—the higher ones with the higher, and the lower ones with the lower. Hence, the *Shekhinah* dwelt with the lower ones [i.e., in the earthly world]; and so long as the *Shekhinah* was below, heaven and earth were one. And this is what is meant by the verse: "And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them" [Gen. 2:1]⁷¹—that they were completed and fulfilled from one another, and the channels and sources [through which the cosmic effects of the *Sefiroth* flow down] operated harmoniously and emanated from above to below, so that God, may He be blessed, filled everything from above to below. And this is alluded to in the verse, "the Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool" [Isa. 66:1]⁷²—that God dwells in a state of even mediation between the upper ones and the lower ones. But when Adam came and sinned, the ranks were disrupted, the channels were shattered and the pools [of blessing] were cut off. Thereupon the *Shekhinah* withdrew and the bond [connecting all things] became undone. Then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of blessed memory, came and began to draw the *Shekhinah* back down again, and they prepared for it three thrones and drew it down somewhat, and they made their bodies into thrones for the *Shekhinah*. But the

Shekhinah did not come down to a fixed dwelling on earth, but only to a temporary one, and it dwelled upon them [the Patriarchs]. And the allusion to this is: “and God went up from Abraham” [Gen. 17:22]—that is, from upon Abraham, literally. And concerning Jacob it says, “and God went up from him” [Gen. 35:13]. And concerning this is it written, “the Patriarchs are the *Merkavah* [the chariot of God].”⁷⁰ Thus, in their days the *Shekhinah* was *in suspensio* [literally, “hanging in air”], and found no resting place for its feet on earth, as in the beginning of Creation. But then came Moses, of blessed memory, and all of Israel together with him built the Tabernacle and the vessels, and repaired the broken channels, and put the ranks in order, and repaired the ponds, and drew live water into them from the House of Water Drawing, and then brought the *Shekhinah* back to its dwelling among the lower ones—into the Tent, but not upon the ground as in the beginning of Creation. And the hint of this is: “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” [Exod. 25:8]. We find that the *Shekhinah* was like a guest, moving from place to place, and of this it said “and I shall dwell among them” and not “I shall dwell below” but “among them”—i.e., like a lodger. Until David and Solomon came, and placed the *Shekhinah* on solid ground in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Another element, which emerged only after the *Bahir*, is asserted emphatically and clearly in the Spanish Kabbalah and the *Zohar*: namely, the thesis that the form of each and every individual thing is preformed in the *Shekhinah*. This idea has two facets, which by no means always occur together. On the one hand, the *Sefirot* first receive their various potencies and shapes in the *Shekhinah*; prior to their appearance within the upper or lower *Shekhinah*, they have no shape of their own. On the other hand, this implies, not only that all things in the creaturely world obtain their form from the *Shekhinah*, insofar as it exerts a formative power upon every created thing, but that they already have this form while they are in the *Shekhinah*, insofar as they are constituted and prefigured in it. Thus, in an early text (ca. 1250) containing a peculiar blend of Gnostic and Neoplatonic elements, we read:

This is the potency of the *Shekhinah*, which receives all things, in that they enter it shapeless, but emerge from it with [differentiated] matter and image and shape. And that is the [meaning of] the term “image” (*demuth*)—it is like a coin or a seal or a vessel which corrects [other version: “receives”] form, for it is inconceivable that there be divine matter without *Shekhinah*.⁷¹

However, further on in this small book there is no fixed order given for the *Sefirot*, and it speaks of an order of a different kind—one in which the power of the *Shekhinah* is located on the “throne,” in which “the Glory of the Omnipresent dwells in its midst and dwells within it.”

It is quite understandable that this act of individuation would take place in the upper *Shekhinah*. Here the transition occurs from the shapelessness of *Hokhmah*, which is called (in a play of words) *Koah Mah*—that is, the potency of everything that can come into existence—to the individuation and differentiation of all being in *Binah*, the upper *Shekhinah*. Indeed, this view is already described in a number of writings of the Kabbalists of Gerona, but the process of individuation is shifted, in the *Zohar* and later Kabbalah, to the lower *Shekhinah*. It is designated there as “the form that embraces all forms,” in which each specific form is already prefigured in its specific individuality, just as it takes in and manifests all possible forms of those *Sefirot* that are above it. Later Kabbalists, such as R. Meir ibn Gabbai,⁷² tried to define more precisely how the individual nature of each thing can be understood within the *Shekhinah* as the “will of the motion,” as the driving element that seeks expression in the process of Creation.

This idea was expressed differently in the motif of the garments of the *Shekhinah*. All of God’s creatures are prefigured in the garments of the *Shekhinah*; hence, when He directs the world, He looks upon the creatures, not in Himself, but rather their prefigurations in the garments of the *Shekhinah*:

The *Shekhinah* is the form of the upper and lower beings; all of the shapes of the *Sefirot* and all their names are formed within it, and all the souls and angels and holy beings are engraved in it. . . . How

does one engrave upon it the lower forms, which do not belong to its reality? This is compared to a king, who dwells in his palace, and various people come to see him. There are those who look upon his garment, those who look at his body, and those who look at his deeds. It is certainly clear from his deeds that he is king, for he makes several changes in his garments: the garments he wears in the morning he does not wear in the evening, and the garments that he wears one day he does not wear another day. . . . Likewise the *Shekhinah*: how many garments she has, from which the Holy One blessed be He has created thrones, angels, *hayyoth* and *serafim*, and heaven and earth and all that He created within them. And all of the creatures that he made from these garments of hers, he has listed them all and engraved them upon his garment. . . . And it is the image of all, and within it the Holy One blessed be He, who is *YHVH*, gives light, like the soul to the body. Within all is found He that grasps all and connects all and who is not alluded to in any way [i.e., the *’Ein-Sof*]. For everything is hinted at in the *Shekhinah*, who is dressed in the garments on which are drawn all created things, and it is called by all their names.⁷³

In this all-embracing symbolism, the *Shekhinah* fully represents the animation of the concealed divine life. In the course of this development the image of the *Shekhinah* is also associated with the mystical theory of language, so crucial to the Kabbalah in general. God’s creative energy manifests itself in His word, by means of which, according to the Psalmist, “the heavens were made” (Ps. 33:6). The divine “word,” in its development and individuation from innermost thought to verbal articulation is, for the Kabbalist, the medium by which the divine energy operates. Indeed, the world of divine potencies is symbolically expressed, above all, in the world of language. According to an oft-quoted *mishnah* (Tractate *Avot*), the world was created by means of ten “words” (*ma’amarot*) or logoi; subsequently, the doctrine of the *Sefirot* made these ten words into semi-independent, creative primal words in which all active energy was concentrated. But this divine word is not only a one-time manifestation of creative power, which thereafter withdrew from the created world

into itself. On the contrary, it is present in all that is real, and resides within all things as a perpetual or renewing force.

While the *Zohar* interprets every act of divine “speech” as an act of the *Sefiroth*, although not necessarily of the *Shekhinah*, there were contemporary works that qualified this position: every act of Divine speech indicates an act of the *Shekhinah*.⁷⁴ The *Zohar* refers this to the upper *Shekhinah* (i.e., its active aspect); in a passage using the symbolism of the mother, it offers the following interpretation of Genesis 1:3, the first verse in the Torah in which God’s speech is mentioned:

Hitherto, everything hung in the air, in the secret of ²*Ein-Sof*. But as soon as the energy permeated the Upper Palace [the womb of the upper mother, *Binah*], which has the secret name ²*Elohim*, speech is mentioned: “and ²*Elohim* spoke”—for the term “speaking” is not previously employed. Even though the first word of the Torah, *Bereshith* (“in the beginning”) is a logos, it does not say there, “and He spoke.” “He spoke” indicates the level where He asked and wished to know. “He spoke”—a separate potency; this separation was done covertly, through the mystery of ²*Ein-Sof* within the mystery of divine thought [of the beginning of Creation]. “And God spoke”—now that “Palace” [i.e., the upper *Shekhinah*] gave birth, impregnated by the holy seed, and it gave birth in secret, that it not be heard at all. Once it was born, a voice is heard that is audible on the outside. (*Zohar*, I, 16b)

Hence, *Binah*, the upper mother, spoke in Creation, in the process of emanation whereby the inner world of the Godhead is brought forth and expressed as an active force. This force, however, is gathered and concentrated in the lower *Shekhinah*, which carries it down in the form of the living divine “word” that permeates and vivifies all of the worlds that are outside of the Godhead.

In this sense the Kabbalists of the thirteenth century, and first and foremost Nahmanides, were correct in identifying this notion of the *Shekhinah* with the *memra*—the paraphrase used in the Targumim, the Aramaic Bible translations, to refer to God’s word.⁷⁵ The *memra* is not merely

a linguistic device for overcoming the problem of biblical anthropomorphisms; it has theological significance in its own right. The *memra*, like the *Shekhinah*, is, as Abelson correctly puts it, “a world-permeating force, a reality in the world of matter or mind, the immanent aspect of God, holding all things under its omnipresent sway.”⁷⁶

VI

What is the precise contribution of the *Zohar* to the conception of the *Shekhinah*? What new things does it have to say, beyond what we already know from other early Kabbalistic books?

In general, one might say that post-*Bahir* Kabbalistic literature still vacillated between an impersonal image of the *Shekhinah* as a divine attribute—albeit one that was portrayed as an independent image—and a strongly personal conception, as was characteristic of the older hypostases such as the divine word, wisdom, compassion, etc. Many thirteenth-century authors were reluctant to go so far in personalizing the conception of the *Shekhinah*, and they greatly toned down, obscured, or even totally omitted such a conception. The opposite is the case in the *Zohar*, where the personal elements in the image of the *Shekhinah* come decisively to the fore. If we compare those passages that speak more vaguely about the attributes of the *Shekhinah* with those that develop its description as a persona, at times almost ad absurdum, we find that the latter group displays a far more powerful imagery.

The number of passages in which the *Zohar* deals with the *Shekhinah* and its symbols is enormous and, if examined in detail, would yield a great deal for our study. Two points ought to be emphasized here, where we are concerned with elucidating the basic lines of development of this conception: namely, the sexual symbolism of the *Shekhinah*, and the emphasis on its dark and destructive aspects. These features are important precisely because they derive from the depths of R. Moses de Leon's personality, and may shed light upon the world of imagery in which this author lived. Nothing prefiguring these notions in older Kabbalistic lit-

erature even remotely approaches the power and vitality with which these notions repeatedly occur at the center of the Zoharic discussions. A further element ought to be mentioned: the return of active and, in Kabbalistic terms, masculine aspects even in the lower *Shekhinah*, which had previously been seen as quintessentially feminine.

When the *Zohar* speaks of the *Shekhinah* as feminine—it quite frequently uses the term *‘alma de-nukva*, “the world of the female,” in this connection—this is more than a mere circumlocution for the passive and receptive element among the divine attributes. Of course, the very statement that God, who is pure activity and positivity, could have a negative and passive side is itself extremely unorthodox. But the author of the *Zohar* goes even further. Of course, for him, as for the other Kabbalists, the *Shekhinah* is regarded as the “celestial Donna” (*ha-ishah ha-‘elyonah*; cf. II, 54b) or the “Woman of Light” (*iteta de-nehora*),⁷⁷ “in whose mystery are rooted all the females in the earthly world.”⁷⁸ In brief, she is the eternal feminine. Joseph Gikatilla puts it in similar terms: “The *Shekhinah* in Abraham’s time was called Sarah, in Isaac’s time Rebecca, and in Jacob’s time Rachel.”⁷⁹ All of the hierarchies (*tikkunim*) of the *Shekhinah* are female, and most of necessity lack the male element, represented in the *Zohar* by Joseph (as explained at length in *Zohar*, I, 246b).

But the feminine quality of the *Shekhinah* is understood, first and foremost, and emphatically, in her role as female partner in the sacred union, *zivuga kaddisha*, whereby the unity of the divine potencies is realized through the union of male and female. Without going into detail (this matter is discussed in the previous chapter), the male is conceived of here either as the sixth and central *Sefirah*, *Tifereth* (symbolized by Jacob, Rachel’s husband), or as the ninth one, *Yesod* (symbolized by Joseph the Righteous), into which all the higher *Sefiroth* flow, and which constitutes, as it were, the phallus of the supernal man. In more general terms the union of *Tifereth* and *Malkhuth* is portrayed as the marriage of the holy king and the queen, while that of *Yesod* and *Malkhuth* is described in very precise terms as the supernal archetype of earthly sexual union, and is uninhibitedly depicted in such terms. When performed within the limits of *mitsvah* and *halakhah*, the holiness of the act of procreation as a true

mystery is consistently explained by the *Zohar* in terms of this sacred union in the realm of the *Sefiroth*. Only when man abandons the realm of sanctity does the area of sexuality fall into the world of impurity, and it is then seen, not only as the profane per se, but as demonic and depraved.

The number of *Zohar* passages in this area is legion.⁸⁰ The sexual imagery of the Song of Songs is treated here altogether differently than it is in the old allegories of God's relationship with Israel. Even a comparison of the *Zohar* with the earliest Kabbalistic commentary on the Song of Songs, that written by R. Ezra of Gerona a mere fifty or sixty years earlier and with which the author of the *Zohar* was acquainted,⁸¹ reveals the great difference in the use of erotic imagery. It was the author of the *Zohar* who read the entire text of the Song of Songs as a nuptial hymn of the Godhead itself. In the *Zohar*, III, 214b, the stages of union (*yihuda*) are portrayed as stages of sexual coupling (*zivuga*), in a highly naturalistic interpretation of the Song of Songs 2:6. Many other biblical verses are likewise interpreted as hymns to the holy marriage (*tushbahta de zivuga*).⁸²

The rhetorical antithesis found in the following passage provides an excellent illustration of how natural this view is to the author:

It is the way of the world that if one man wishes to take another's wife, [the other] becomes angry and does not allow it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, does not act in this way! "This is the offering" [Exod. 25:3]—this is the Congregation of Israel. Even though all of her [i.e., the *Shekhinah*'s] love is for Him, and all of His love is for her, [the children of Israel] take her away from Him, that she may dwell among them. . . . And even though they take her, they are only able to do so with the permission of her husband and his will, so that they may perform the service of love before Him. (*Zohar*, II, 135a)⁸³

It is hardly by chance that the very first lines of the *Zohar* begin with the explicit sexual symbolism of the pollination of the rose—a symbol for the *Shekhinah* frequently used by the *Zohar*. This symbolism continues throughout the entire book: when R. Simeon ben Yohai, the legendary

hero and chief speaker of the book, gives his deathbed speech—a passage evidently intended as the conclusion of the book—he ends with an unusually solemn but no less daring homily about Zion, the Holy of Holies, the place in which the oneness of all things in God is born; he calls Zion the womb of the *Shekhinah*, in which God procreates the blessing that spreads to the world.⁸⁴

The entire dynamics of the Zoharic notion of God is based upon this doctrine, in which the oneness and unity of the divine life are realized in the sacred marriage; under no circumstances can these dynamics be separated from this doctrine. Although there was no lack of attempts in later years at elaborate allegorical reinterpretation of this sexual symbolism, whose images had carried the author of the *Zohar* to such heights of enthusiasm, it nevertheless caused difficulties for major Kabbalistic theologians.⁸⁵ I have discussed elsewhere the significance of sexual imagery for Kabbalistic ritual.⁸⁶

As already explained, the upper *Shekhinah* is viewed as indissolubly and uninterruptedly connected with the supernal Wisdom or Sophia, the “Father” (*Abba*). This union of the supernal mother and father is completely unaffected by human action, although in the present state of the world—that is, since the expulsion from Paradise—the coupling of the king and the queen is no longer God’s business alone, but is a human concern as well. As a result, this mystical union becomes the object of certain rituals. At the time of the expulsion from Eden, the lower mother, that is, the *Shekhinah*, was expelled along with man. Indeed, in a passage renowned for its bold exegesis (*Zohar*, I, 53b), it is not quite clear whether God expelled man from Paradise, or whether it was perhaps man who expelled God, in the guise of the *Shekhinah*! Since that time the state of things represented in the *Zohar* by the central image of the “Exile of the *Shekhinah*” has existed in the world—that is, the separation and cutting off of the *Shekhinah* from its constant union with the upper forces that she was supposed to carry and transmit to Creation. It is now up to man to fill this lack.

In this context, a further development of the theme is important for our study: while the *Shekhinah* is predominantly described in feminine

symbols, it is not entirely without active, masculine aspects. Both of these sides are defined most clearly in a passage describing the *Sefirah* as the “redeeming angel” of Genesis 48:16, the angel who protects the world:

This is the angel who is sometimes male and sometimes female. For when he channels blessings to the world, he is male and is called male; just as the male bestows [fecundating] blessings upon the female, so does he bestow blessings upon the world. But when his relationship to the world is that of judgment [i.e., when he manifests himself in his restrictive power as a judge], then he is called female. Just as a female is pregnant with the embryo, so is he pregnant with judgment, and is then called female. (*Zohar*, I, 232a)

Hence, the female character of the *Shekhinah* is linked here with its restrictive and dangerous features. The restraint of the flow of life, a quality intrinsic to the activity of judgment (*Din*), frequently entails destructive consequences for the world. But when the *Shekhinah* functions as a medium for the downward flow of life-giving energies, it is understood in male symbols, the most prominent of which is the divine name *Adonai* (Lord).

The problem of the active and passive elements in the *Shekhinah* is seen from a different angle in another passage (I, 31a):

At the time that the pair unite together, the female is called by a male name, in order to show that the female is included in him in one entity, for then there is found the blessing of the Matrona, and there is no separation whatsoever. And concerning this it is said, “He hath desired it [i.e., Zion] for His habitation” [Ps. 132:13], and it is written, “For the Lord hath chosen Zion” [ibid.]—Zion, specifically, that He is found in her and resides in her. . . . And of this it is written, “But of Zion it shall be said: ‘This man and that was born in her’ ” [Ps. 87:5]—this one for *Din* [Judgment] and that for *Rahamim* [Mercy].⁸⁷ When they unite together in one *zivuga* [union] then it is called Zion . . .

When the *Shekhinah* is separated from the active flow, it is called “Jerusalem”; however, in the root of the union of the two poles, the distinction between male and female within the Godhead ceases. In other passages the *Shekhinah* is called “mother” even during the state of union, while in the state of separation she is called “wife.” In yet another version:

So long as the *matronitha* is with the king and nourished you, she is called “your mother.” But now that she is exiled and is far from the king, she is only called “thy father’s wife.” (*Zohar*, III, 75a)

The theme of the active powers within the feminine element turned in an altogether different direction in later Kabbalah in the doctrine of the *mayin nukvin*—the “female waters” or unique powers of the feminine. The conception of the *Shekhinah* as a mere repository of the forces pouring into it, of the feminine as purely receptive and passive—at least insofar as the issue was the *Shekhinah*’s relationship to God and not its activity in Creation—could not long survive in the Kabbalah after the *Zohar*. In the long run, the dialectics of femininity, including the element of giving, could not remain suppressed indefinitely. To be sure, there was something intellectually fascinating in the idea of the *Shekhinah* as a pure medium, as a mirror reflecting the forces above; but where there was a clearer sense of the maternal, birth-giving, and creative element that comes about as a result of the very act of receiving, the notion of the *Shekhinah* itself needed to be altered and corrected. This alteration was primarily one accomplished by Lurianic Kabbalah, through the formulation of the concept of *mayin nukvin*. This doctrine presents the *Shekhinah* as likewise incorporating active forces. These forces are not awakened by the sacred marriage but, on the contrary, it is their awakening that makes this union at all possible.

The *Zohar* scarcely uses the term *mayin nukvin*, and certainly not in the above sense, although it does repeatedly invoke the general principle that every “arousal from above” requires a complementary “arousal from below”—that is, human activity. However, the *Zohar* sees this principle in terms of the Godhead being able to act below only when its powers are

aroused and activated by the stimulus of human actions, and not as alluding to the powers of the feminine as the basis for this arousal.

R. Moses Cordovero⁸⁸ already explains that there are two distinct aspects in the male *Sefirah* of *Yesod*: In one, which occurs prior to the union with the *Shekhinah*, the “lower waters” of the *Shekhinah* gush up through *Yesod*—that is, the forces that are cast back by the *Shekhinah* rise up as “reflected light.”⁸⁹ In other words, even prior to the second aspect, the actual union in which the forces of maleness penetrate into the *Shekhinah*, forces coming from the *Shekhinah* itself rise toward the male element and stimulate it. The term “lower waters,” mentioned in this passage, appears in a talmudic reading of the story of Creation, in which the waters under the firmament are characterized as feminine; this usage became fixed by Isaac Luria. Thus, Cordovero continues, while the process of emanation “begins as direct, [unrefracted] light, from which emanates the reflected light,” this situation is reversed in the mystery of union among human beings. The outpouring of energy, of active light (although essentially only reflected) comes from the female, arousing and activating the male.

Hence, the *Shekhinah* is charged with active powers, even in relation to the upper realms, and it is only as a result of them that it is also active in relation to the lower realm. However, the dialectics of femininity is primarily concerned—and this is worth emphasizing—not with its activity within creation, but rather within the context of the divine life itself. One can also speak of spontaneity hidden within receptivity. There were those Kabbalists who saw a symbol for this in “Miriam’s well,” of which it is written, “Spring up, O well—sing ye unto it” (Num. 21:17), which they read as referring to the element within the supernal female that arouses the female waters.⁹⁰

It is true that Lurianic Kabbalah strongly emphasized that *mayin nukvin* are generated by the good deeds of human beings (a point made even more strongly in the ethical writings of later Kabbalah), but this is not their only source. Luria speaks even more frequently of processes in the upper *Sefiroth* themselves that elicit such forces within every individual *Sefirah*. Of course, the transformation of these forces that originate in *Din*, the aspect of rigor and judgment, into forces of *Rahamim*, of grace, is dependent upon human good deeds.⁹¹ Moreover, since every *Sefirah* du-

plicates within itself the overall structure of the entire system, each *Sefirah* contains its own aspect of the *Shekhinah* (*Malkhuth*), in which it produces its own *mayin nukvin*.

I have already briefly observed that the *Zohar*'s image of the *Shekhinah* contains dark and destructive traits as well, even though, compared with other female figures in the history of religions, these are relatively pallid and tend to be ascribed to an aspect of the Godhead that allows them to be presented in a relatively harmless manner. Within the Godhead, there are *Sefiroth* of both love and judgment, both of which emanate their energy into the *Shekhinah*; depending upon which potency dominates, the lower *Shekhinah* appears either as a loving or as a punishing and chastizing mother.

But even beyond this, in many passages the *Zohar* presents the *Shekhinah* as bizarrely linked with the Other Side (*Sitra Aħra*), the demonic and destructive power. True, this power ultimately originates in one of the divine *Sefiroth*—namely, that of severe and punishing judgment (*Din Kasheh*); however, it is now independent, has left the realm of holiness for that of evil and Satan, and become a “shell,” *kelippah*.⁹² The *Zohar*'s remarks about the Left Side are not always clear; they may refer to the *Sefiroth* of *Din*, of God's judgmental power, which are located on the left side of the Tree of Divine Emanation, or they may be used to designate the Other Side, which is outside, or even opposed to the Divine, in the realm of evil and contamination.

When these forces of the Left Side become stronger, primarily due to human erring and sinning, the *Shekhinah* becomes the executrix of the powers of judgment which have entered her.⁹³ But at times the *Zohar* goes even further: the *Shekhinah* actually comes under the sway of the Other Side, which penetrates and becomes entrenched within her, with disastrous consequences for Israel and for the entire world. This may be caused by the weakness or helplessness of the *Shekhinah*, because it is lacking the impetus created by man's good deeds; or it may be caused by the preponderance within her of those forces that, because of their stern and punitive nature (*Din Kasheh*), have an affinity with the Other Side. Overwhelmed by these dark forces, the *Shekhinah* herself becomes dark and destructive:

When the righteous multiply in the world, *Kenesseth Yisra'el* [i.e., the *Shekhinah*] emits sweet fragrances [like a rose], and is blessed by the holy king, and her face is radiant. But when the wicked people increase in the world, *Kenesseth Yisra'el* as it were does not emit sweet fragrances, but tastes of the Other, bitter Side. Of this state it is written, "He has cast down from heaven the 'earth'" [Lam. 2:1], and her face is darkened.⁹⁴

Then she becomes like the rose who is surrounded by thorns and thistles, namely, the forces of the demonic that hold it captive.

This ambivalence in the *Shekhinah*'s nature is illustrated in a number of symbols. As a counterpart to the Tree of Life, which symbolizes the *Sefi-roth* of *Yesod* or *Tifereth*, the *Shekhinah* is represented as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—but this is also called the "Tree of Death," because the death-bringing "Other Side" attaches itself to this tree.⁹⁵ In the *Zohar* this term is used both for the *Shekhinah* itself and for the Other Side,⁹⁶ from which we may infer the author's perception that these two aspects are identified with one another. Insofar as the *Shekhinah* is identified with the Tree of Death, one may speak of it as having a trace of the chthonian element (i.e., pertaining to the underworld) so often displayed by the Great Mother in mythology, and also appropriate to the *Shekhinah*, seen as a symbol of the esoteric interior of the "earth." Many other symbols, such as the above-mentioned lunar symbolism so emphasized in the *Zohar*, suggest a similar association.

But most revealing of all for our purposes is a statement that at first glance seems highly surprising: the author describes the *Shekhinah* in terms of the image from the Book of Proverbs, "Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on the netherworld" (Prov. 5:5). In the original context this phrase does not refer to Divine Wisdom at all, but to its antagonist, the whorish, "strange woman." The transfer of this image to the *Shekhinah* is highly instructive for the history of the Jewish religion. Those historians of this century who have dealt so intensively with the Jewish doctrine of "Wisdom" have far too frequently relied upon mere conjecture (as I noted with some melancholy at the start of this discus-

sion), particularly in their attempts to draw a connection between Wisdom in Judaism and the antagonist of Wisdom in other Oriental myths. Hence, we find the following opinion: in the contrast between Wisdom and the “riotous woman Folly” (Prov. 9:13ff.) who seduces men to ritual prostitution and fornication, Divine Wisdom itself acquired certain traits of its mythical opponent; when opposing the widespread sexual cults of Ishtar, Astarte, and Anath, it was embellished with the traits of bride and mother.⁹⁷

Such a transfer cannot be convincingly demonstrated in the Bible. However, we clearly see the occurrence of a very similar transformation in the Kabbalah, particularly in the *Zohar*: when a way of thinking that sees itself as strictly Jewish draws upon symbols from deep strata, it does not even recoil from such obviously paradoxical changes as attributing characteristics of Lilith to the *Shekhinah*. The *Zohar* repeatedly contrasts Lilith, as the whorish woman, with the *Shekhinah*, the noble or capable woman of chapter 31 of Proverbs.⁹⁸ Yet a comparison of two *Zohar* passages—I, 223a–b and III, 60b—shows how far the author’s mythical imagination can go in uniting these two figures. The first passage describes the *Shekhinah* in its appearance as a power of harsh judgment, manifesting destructive traits—but at the same time as the mother of Metatron, the highest potency in the angelic world, who “emerged from between her legs.” The second passage is closely related to the first, developing variations of the same theme in new directions in a manner typical of the *Zohar*. Here the *Shekhinah* is described as the mother of two females from the demonic region: Lilith and Naamah. Hence, the demonic figures are born from her—truly an extremely daring notion. In the first passage, in images reminiscent of Indian mythology, the *Shekhinah* is called the “wisdom of Solomon,” the moon, and, above all, “the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10):

A thousand mountains loom before her, and all are like a puff of wind to her. A thousand mighty streams rush past her, and she swallows them in one swallow. Her nails reach out to a thousand and seventy sides; her hands grasp on to twenty-five thousand sides;

nothing eludes her rule on this side or the other [i.e., the *Sitra Aħra*]. How many thousands of potencies of judgment are grasped in her hair. . . . (*Zohar*, I, 223b)

Further on, the “hair of the moon” is contrasted with that of her demonic antagonist, Lilith (the length of whose hair is mentioned in the Talmud); it is described as a source of destructive power, as are her nails and their clippings. Thus, in the place usually occupied by “Mother Zion,” we find a ghastly figure of dread, painted in images strongly reminiscent of Indian mythology. No wonder we are told in three separate places that “her feet go down to death.”⁹⁹ In the symbolic thinking of the Lurianic Kabbalah, this image was completely accepted and frequently used.

In the sixteenth-century Kabbalah of Safed, the personal notion of the *Shekhinah* as the feminine within God can be described by two examples. The first is in the ritual formula—introduced in the time of R. Moses Cordovero—that preceded the performance of every religious commandment: “For the sake of the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His *Shekhinah*, I am prepared to do . . .”¹⁰⁰, as well as in the development of the rites of the sacred marriage, which I have treated elsewhere.¹⁰¹ The other matter pertains to the visions of the Kabbalists. By way of illustration, let me cite an account preserved for us by the pious letter writer Shlomo Shlimel Dresnitz, who in the early seventeenth century gathered and recorded the legendary traditions of the Kabbalists of Safed.¹⁰² Once, following a serious illness, Rabbi Abraham Halevi of Safed went to Jerusalem,

. . . and he immediately secluded himself for three days and three nights, fasting and weeping. At the end of the three days, he went to the Western Wall, where he wept copiously. Upon raising his eyes, he saw above the wall the figure of a woman with her back toward him; out of respect for our Creator, I shall not record the garb in which he saw her.¹⁰³ But as soon as he saw her in this state, he fell upon his face and cried out in tears: “Mother Zion! Woe is me that I have seen you thus!” And he wept and tore his beard and

the hairs of his head until he swooned and collapsed and fell upon his face and slept. Then he saw in a dream that she came and put her hand on his face and wiped away his tears and said to him: "Be comforted, Abraham my son, 'There is hope for thy future, and thy children shall return to their own border' [Jer. 31:17]."

Together with this intensely personal portrait of the *Shekhinah*, the Lurianic Kabbalah introduces a retrogressive process, upon which I should like to touch here briefly, and one that brings us back to the earlier stages of development of this concept. The personal image of the *Shekhinah* dissolves here and again becomes to a great extent an impersonal symbol for God's immanence in the world and the pure inwardness of the Divine within man (itself a far from unproblematic concept). The older great symbol, a product of Kabbalistic daring, returns here alongside a different, more interior symbol, first found in Lurianic Kabbalah. I refer to the doctrine of the "sparks of the *Shekhinah*," which are dispersed throughout the world and imbedded in the "external" reality—an image in which two elements, the concretely tangible and the demonically corrupt, strangely overlap and balance one another. Whether one stresses the Manichean quality of this idea (in terms of the objective relationship of the ideas, not in terms of historical influence), or whether one sees this as an expression of pantheistic feeling groping its way into the foreground in the sixteenth century, it is clear that the original meaning of this concept is dissolving here. Hillel Zeitlin, an expert on Hasidism, observed¹⁰⁴ that the eighteenth-century Hasidim, in their struggle to purify Kabbalistic notions following the messianic tempest of heretical Sabbatianism, most often arrived at an abstract notion of the *Shekhinah*. They saw it almost exclusively in terms of the divine life force, *ḥayyuth*, intrinsic to the universe, i.e., a divine quality. They rarely spoke of her as a mother, with all the overtones and undertones inherent in this archetype. This may have been an understandable reaction to the excesses of the Sabbatians, who drew orgiastic conclusions from their extremely sexual conception of the *Shekhinah*. In the Lurianic doctrine of the "sparks of the *Shekhinah*," which was highly popular among the Hasidim, the ancient symbol is, so to speak, taken back into itself, so that often, as at the very

beginning of its history, it signifies no more than the unspecified presence of the Divine in the world.

VII

In conclusion, I would like to respond to a question that has no doubt occurred to a number of readers during the discussion of these notions of the feminine within the divine. Can the *Shekhinah* be described as a cosmic force in the same sense as we find the feminine in the image of Shakti in Indian Tantric religion? To my mind, I believe that we can discern quite clear differences between the two conceptions—differences no less profound than their affinities.

The schematic representations of the Sefirotic world in geometric symbols can be legitimately compared, without distorting the subject, to the forms of the *yantra*—diagrams intended to guide meditation, which were first interpreted by Heinrich Zimmer in his masterpiece, *Kunstform und Yoga* (Berlin, 1926). Utilizing geometric configurations, these *yantras* illustrate the development of the various gods and their mates (Shaktis). Both the Sefirotic tree and the *Shriyantra*—which make similar use of primal, ancient symbols of the triadic form—can be taken above all as depictions of the self-unfolding of the transcendent and unknowable. The student of Zimmer's second, posthumous opus¹⁰⁵ will be amazed to discover the Kabbalistic symbols of the point and the triangle in these remarkable discussions of Indian material. The absolute is the energy point that cannot be represented but only focused upon, the hidden center from which everything spreads out. The creative energy that spreads from within the absolute, touching the center and eternally uniting with it, is the primal Shakti, represented by the innermost interpenetrating triangle of the *Shriyantra*. This symbolism is not identical with that of the *Zohar*, but there is a deep relation between them. The author of the *Zohar* understands the primal point not as the unknowable ultimate depths of 'Ein-Sof but as the unconstructable and hence totally indissoluble *Hokhmah* (Wisdom), in which opposites nullify and merge. This primal point is indissolubly united with the upper *Shekhinah*, represented by the sym-

bol of the house or the womb, in which the primal point of *Hokhmah* (wisdom) is sown as the world seed. Thus, the Sefirotic pair of *Hokhmah* and *Binah* have something of the nature of the Shakti and her supernal consort. This resemblance is even more striking when we recall that in at least a few, albeit late, Kabbalistic schools, *Hokhmah* stands for the unconscious and unknown, while *Binah* represents the conscious.¹⁰⁶ Just as in Kabbalah *Hokhmah* emanates nine *Sefiroth* from within itself, so in the Indian doctrine the transcendent and unknowable in the invisible primal point are represented in the *Shriyantra* diagram by nine interpenetrating triangles, representing the male and female potencies of the god and of his Shakti.

The Shakti is the dynamic aspect of the world substance; it is itself the world of manifestation, at the same time as it is within it and works within it. But this last statement, repeated in various ways in Woodroffe's and Zimmer's discussions of Shakti,¹⁰⁷ cannot be applied to the *Shekhinah*, even where it can be thought of as an active potency. It is true that the lower *Shekhinah* operates in everything and animates everything: "His Kingdom rules in everything" (Ps. 103:19), as the biblical verse reads; it is the spark that dwells in everything, or is trapped or captive in everything—but the *Shekhinah* is in exile there (a notion that, so far as I can see, is totally absent in the Indian conceptions). The lower *Shekhinah* is not itself the thing or manifestation in which it is present; to put it in Indian terms, it is not the world of Maya. The manifesting and the manifestation, Shakti and Maya, which are one for the Indian esoteric, are not identical for the Kabbalist. The spark of the *Shekhinah*, which resides within concrete things, is always distinct from the phenomenality of these same things, as clearly demonstrated by the discussions on this point in many Hasidic texts. The spark can be elevated from the things in which it is mixed, without thereby affecting the things qua phenomena. A different, perhaps even more intense, life enters into them; but there seems to be no necessary inner bond between this specific manifestation and the specific spark of the *Shekhinah* that dwells within it. There are only occasional hints of an esoteric stratum of this doctrine, which may have gone further than the written formulations would suggest.

One further point:

The God and Goddess are the first self-revelation of the Absolute, the male being the personification of the passive aspects which we know as Eternity, the female of the activating energy (*śakti*), the dynamism of Time. Though apparently opposites, they are in essence one.¹⁰⁸

It is impossible to apply this to the Kabbalist schema without misconstruing the sense of the symbols. None of the *Sefiroth* appearing as male in these pairs could be identified with the masculine in Indian symbolism, albeit the idea of femininity as producing the motion of time may indeed correspond to an astonishing passage in *Sefer ha-Bahir* (S §49; M §§72–73). This passage describes the *Shekhinah* as the precious gem that “brings forth the years,” i.e., time, which flows from the primal time gathered therein, but I am by no means certain that this primal time can be identified with eternity.

On the other hand, when dealing with these comparisons, we must not forget that the *Shekhinah* is split in the Kabbalah, so that the active element within the feminine has been primarily absorbed in the symbolism of the upper *Shekhinah*. The latter is the womb of the *Sefiroth*, of the aeons and cycles of the worlds (*shemitoth*), while other aspects of Shakti, such as the eternal feminine and the destructive element, are expressed in the final *Sefirah* or *Malkhuth*. On the other hand, the notion of the masculine as purely inactive and passive, an idea that seems intrinsic to the doctrine of Shakti, is totally alien to the Kabbalah, in which the male is perceived as active and flowing.

Gilgul:
THE
TRANSMIGRATION
OF SOULS

I

The Kabbalists believed in a doctrine of transmigration of souls through various bodies and forms of existence. Was this teaching developed independently, by means of spiritual experiences and states similar to those that produced it in other religions? Or should we assume that the initial impulse toward this teaching originated in an older tradition and among other groups—although, of course, subsequently developed by Kabbalah in its own way? This question arises in light of the circumstances under which the doctrine of metempsychosis (transmigration) first appears in Kabbalah. In the earliest known Kabbalistic text, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, redacted in the south of France around 1180, this teaching is taken for granted, and is elucidated without any apologetic tone. This is all the more remarkable, since during the period in which this book appeared, official Jewish theology, as represented by medieval Jewish philosophy, was emphatically opposed to this doctrine.¹

This situation is analogous to that in Christianity and Islam. Both the Church and the most authoritative groups in Sunni Islam flatly rejected these notions, which, as we know, only survived in certain religious sects or currents. Their common roots were to be found in Orphic, Platonic, and Oriental concepts of metempsychosis and metempsychosis, as these were accepted in various forms by early Gnostic Christian sects.²

When the Church, in the sixth century, definitively condemned the teachings of Origen, which bore a certain resemblance to these notions, it was no longer possible to advocate these ideas in official Catholic circles; they were, however, preserved in various sects that maintained a Gnostic, and specifically Manichean, legacy.³

A similar process occurred in Islam: the Shiite belief in the reincarnation of the imams, as well as the more general concepts of transmigration adopted by various disparate groups, were regarded as more or less heretical by orthodox Moslems. The same situation pertained in groups such as Mutazilites and the Ismailite Gnostics, as well as certain Sufi groups within Islamic mysticism.⁴ Here, too, according to the best scholarly authorities, the common source of these notions must be sought among the Eastern Christian Gnostics. It is interesting to note, however, the existence of an apocryphal tradition linking the origin of the doctrine of reincarnation to a southern Arabian Jew, who associated it with a messianic perspective. There is respectable documentation that testifies that, during the period of great ferment in the East in the ninth and tenth centuries, when such ideas were promulgated within Islam, adherents of these ideas could also be found among Oriental Jews.

In the early tenth century R. Saadiah Gaon, the first major systematic theologian of Judaism in Arabic civilization, polemicized against those Jews who had accepted these ideas, which he rejected as "madness and confusion."⁵ According to a work on religious schisms and sects of the Moslem author Ibn Mansour al-Baghdadi (d. 1037), some Jews believed in the transmigration of souls, citing in proof the third chapter of Daniel. They interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's vision as indicating that God had transformed the king into seven different kinds of beasts and birds of prey in order to punish him, until He finally restored him and returned him to the world as a believer in monotheism.⁶ This interpretation is of

particular interest, because it is connected with an entirely different circle than that of the oldest Kabbalists, whose biblical justifications of the doctrine of transmigration do not include this passage.

The most important document concerning this teaching among Oriental Jews likewise contains a different justification than that used by the Kabbalists. Kirkisani, a tenth-century Karaite author, writes in his *Sefer ha-Orot* that Anan ben David, to whom the eighth-century schism between Rabbinite and Karaite Jews is traced, accepted the doctrine of metempsychosis and wrote a special treatise about it. According to Kirkisani, many of Anan's supporters, who eventually broke with the Karaites, continued to follow this doctrine. Kirkisani, who was well versed in Karaite writings (written in Arabic, and no longer extant), or at least with their verbal claims, devotes two chapters of his book to refuting their arguments on this point.⁷ He too uses biblical proof texts, albeit altogether different ones from those used by the early Kabbalists, so that it is difficult to assume a direct link between these Oriental Jewish groups of the eighth to tenth centuries and the earliest Kabbalistic circles in twelfth-century southern France. It is possible, however, that the Kabbalistic traditions stem back to other Oriental groups, whose existence can be indirectly gleaned from an analysis of the *Bahir*.

On the other hand, we find the striking fact that the notion of transmigration of souls first occurs in the Kabbalah at exactly the same time and in the same environment in which the Catharist movement in southern France had its greatest success. The Catharists, whose beliefs contained many Gnostic elements and who advocated strictly anticlerical doctrines, emphatically believed in transmigration, including reincarnation in the bodies of animals.⁸ Of course, given their radically dualistic conception of the distinction between the physical world and the spiritual world, this doctrine did not pose the same problems it did for monotheistic theology and its philosophical doctrine of the soul. Anyone who, following Aristotle, regarded the soul as an entelechy of the living body was bound to reject the idea of the passage of an individual soul into another body. By contrast, the dualistic psychology of the Platonists and the Gnostics could more readily allow for such a doctrine, or was at least compatible with it. If souls were seen as spirits that had fallen from the

world of light to be imprisoned in the world of matter (ideas that were very widespread during the Middle Ages), it was not difficult to posit the wanderings of such souls from one body to another. According to the Catharists, for example, a soul could find redemption from its wanderings only if it entered into the body of a “perfect person” or “good Christian” from among their own number.

Despite its proximity in place and time, the Kabbalistic version of the doctrine, as presented in several passages of the *Bahir*,⁹ does not reveal any immediately visible link with the Catharistic teaching. While such a historic influence seems possible in principle, and even seems probable to me, the question of the historical origin of these ideas still remains open. This is particularly true in light of several fragments of an older, undoubtedly Oriental, Jewish Gnostic source that was demonstrably used and reworked by the redactors of the *Bahir*; these pieces, which are extant, come from a book entitled *Raza Rabbah* (The Great Mystery), which I have discussed elsewhere.¹⁰ *Raza Rabbah* contains the original version of a *Bahir* passage (S §86; M §121–122) dealing with transmigration—yet in the older passage this doctrine does not appear at all! Was this teaching added during the redaction of the *Bahir*? Or did it reach the redactors from another literary source, which we do not yet know? This problem is further complicated by the patently ancient character of these fragments, which are more characteristic of the Orient than of southern France. Likewise, the fact that the doctrine is taken for granted in the *Bahir* passage and supported there with parables can be explained in two very different ways. One might conjecture that these fragments entirely predate the unanimous opposition to this doctrine on the part of Jewish philosophers from the eighth to the twelfth centuries. On the other hand, one might also assume that the groups in which these ideas developed were completely unimpressed by medieval philosophy, and hence felt no obligation to justify their belief in transmigration before such a forum, which had rejected it as heretical. I admit that I tend more toward the former view: namely, that we are dealing here with the vestiges of an early Jewish Gnostic tradition, remnants of which ultimately reached the circle of the *Bahir* from the Orient through ways that are not yet clear to us.

From all that has been said above, it is evident that the classical Jewish tradition, as set down in the Talmud and the midrash, knew nothing of transmigration. In *Sefer ha-Bahir* we find a number of Kabbalistic fragments, in which the new (and possibly very old) ideas of these esoterics are presented in the talmudic style of biblical exegesis, making use of parables. Five passages here speak of transmigration, without yet using a special word for this phenomenon; the term *gilgul* (literally, “turning over” or “rolling over”—i.e., of souls) was used by the Kabbalists, together with a number of other terms, at a later date. A study of these passages is highly revealing.

One passage (S §39; M §58) speaks of the mystical attribute of the Sabbath:

“He ceased from work and rested” [Ex. 31:17]. . . . This teaches that from thence all the souls fly out, as is said, “He ceased from work [*shavat*; can be read as “Sabbath”] and rested.” To a thousand generations, as is said: “The word which He commanded to a thousand generations” [Ps. 105:8].

The same Biblical verse is explicitly cited elsewhere to substantiate the claim that reincarnation may take place as many as a thousand times:

Why are there evildoers who are well off and righteous who suffer evil? Because the righteous man was previously an evildoer in the past and is now being punished. But is a man to be punished for [the sins] of his youth? Has not Rabbi Simon said that one is only punished [by the heavenly court] from one’s twentieth year on! Say to them: I am not speaking of the [same] life, but of that which was in the past. His colleagues said to him: How much longer will you speak unintelligibly? He said to them: Go and see. This is like a person who has planted a vineyard in his garden, and he hoped that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes [after Isa. 5:2]. He saw that he was not succeeding—so he replanted it, placed a fence around it, repaired the breaches, pruned [the vines of] the wild grapes, and planted it a second time. He saw that he was not succeeding—he again fenced it off, and again re-

planted it after pruning it. How often? He said to them: Until a thousand generations, as is written: "He commanded a word to a thousand generations" [Ps. 105:8]. This is what is meant by the [talmudic] saying [*Hagigah* 13b]: "Nine hundred seventy-four generations were lacking [for the figure of one thousand], when the Holy One blessed be He stood and planted them in every generation." (*Bahir*, S §135; M §195, corrected according to MS. München)

This *Bahir* passage is extremely interesting. The objections raised to the speaker, an apocryphal Rabbi Rehumai, indicate that the inquirers, who argue from an exoteric point of view, are totally unfamiliar with the esoteric doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration. The rabbi's statements seem incomprehensible to them, while the idea itself is explained, not in a theoretical manner, but by means of a parable, as in the other *Bahir* passages dealing with this doctrine. The parable mentions explicitly only three abortive attempts at planting the "vineyard." The thousand generations are, of course, not really a thousand; this is simply a quite original application of a talmudic conception to the idea of transmigration. According to talmudic chronology, the Torah—the "word of God" mentioned in the verse—was given twenty-six generations after the Creation of the World. How is this statement consistent with the biblical verse interpreted as saying that God gave His Word (that is, the Torah) after one thousand generations? What happened to the other 974 generations mentioned in the verse? The Talmud replies:

These are the nine hundred seventy-four generations [of evildoers] that were foreseen by God before the world was created, but were not created. The Holy One, blessed be He, stood and sowed them in every generation, and these are the arrogant ones of every generation.¹¹

The use made of this idea in the *Bahir* is clear: the vineyard is replanted in every generation, and the wild grapes are the wicked, who must undergo rebirth and thereby receive the opportunity to emerge from

their new test as righteous. The same notion underlies another passage in the *Bahir*, in which the biblical verse “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh” (Eccles. 1:4) is interpreted as meaning that the very same generation passes on and returns: in other words, that the souls are the same souls, and not different ones. Here, too, the discussion is conducted by means of a parable, which is itself a reworking of a talmudic text.¹² As applied to transmigration, the *Bahir* version is quite peculiar:

To what may this be compared? To a king who had servants, and clad them in garments of silk and embroidery, in accordance with his wealth. They went astray, so he cast them out and pushed them away, and removed his garments, and they went forth. He took the garments and washed them well, until no stain was left on them, and he kept them ready. He then acquired other servants and clad them in those garments, and did not know whether these servants were good or not. So they partook of garments that had already come into the world, and that others had worn before them. . . . And that is the meaning of “And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it” [Eccles. 12:7]. [*Bahir*, S §86; M §122]

The striking comparison of the soul to a garment that is soiled and changed after cleaning is utterly incomprehensible in the context of Neoplatonic thought,¹³ but is understood clearly in terms of the underlying talmudic parable. The Talmud speaks of the soul, which is to be returned to God in a state of purity, in terms of a royal garment loaned out to man; in the *Bahir*, the same image is used in relation to transmigration, rather than to reward and punishment in the future world—a significant turning.

Elsewhere in the *Bahir* (S §104; M §§154–156), transmigration is depicted in a parable filled with enigmatic, esoteric symbolism. This passage speaks of the seventh divine aeon or logos, called “the East of the world, from whence comes the seed of Israel.” The author cites Isaiah 43:5, “I will bring they seed from the East,” and continues:

When Israel is good [before God], I will bring your seed from this place and bring new seed into being for you; but when Israel is bad, I will take of the seed that is already in the world, as it is written: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh” [Eccles. 1:4]—this teaches that it has already come. But what is meant by “and gather thee from the West” [Isa. 43:5]? From that attribute that always leans toward the West. Why is [the West] called *ma‘arav* [also “mixture”]? Because all the seeds are mixed there. To what is this comparable? To a prince, who had a comely and modest bride in his chambers, and took riches from his father’s house and always brought them to her; and she took everything, putting it aside and mixing it all up. After many days, he wished to see what she had gathered and collected. Of this it is written: “I gather thee from the West [i.e., mixture].” And what is her father’s house? As is written, “I will bring thy seed from the East”—this teaches that He brings [the seed] from the East, which he sows in the West, and afterward he gathers what he has sown.

This remarkable passage, with its strikingly Gnostic symbolism, introduces several new ideas. There are new souls, which have never previously existed in the world, and which only descend to the world when Israel proves itself worthy. Generally speaking, however, the same number of old souls keeps circulating in the world from generation to generation. The East and the West are symbols for what were originally the seventh and eighth *Sefiroth* and, in post-*Bahir* Kabbalah, became the last two of the ten *Sefiroth*: the West is usually the final *Sefirah*, while there are differences of opinion regarding the symbolism of the East. The treasure-house of souls is in the East, and the souls are sown within the realm of the *Shekhinah*, which is the mystical West in which they are mixed. The *Shekhinah* is both the bride of the prince and *Kenesseth Yisra’el*, the Congregation of Israel. The souls of Israel that enter into the realm of the *Shekhinah* will be gathered together again from their mixture “after the passage of days”—that is, at the end of time.¹⁴

The same idea with a messianic thrust appears in another *Bahir* passage (S §126, M §184), which speaks about the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik*, which is the “foundation of the world”:

In His hand is the treasure-house of all the souls. When Israel is good, the souls are fit to leave there in order to enter this world [apparently identified here with the “West,” in which the souls are mixed, which is the realm of the *Shekhinah*], but if they are not good, they do not leave. And this is what is meant by the [talmudic] statement “The son of David will not come until all the souls in the body are exhausted” [*Yevamoth* 63b]—that is, all the souls in the body of man. Then the new souls will be permitted to leave, and the son of David will be allowed to be born. How so? Because his soul will go out as a new one among the others.¹⁵

The “body” spoken of in the passage quoted here was always understood in the Jewish exegetical tradition as the celestial treasure-house of souls from which the preexistent souls emerge and descend into the earthly world. In open contrast to this attitude, the *Bahir* identifies the “body” here as the human body itself (indeed, perhaps this might have been the original intention of the talmudic saying, although it does not refer to reincarnation).¹⁶ Before the Messiah can be born, the souls must complete their transmigrations within human bodies. The Messiah’s soul is one of those that have never before existed in the world—a far cry from the theory of messianic reincarnation advocated by the Shiite sects in Islam and their Jewish-Christian sources. It is difficult to determine whether the thesis in the *Bahir* evolved in the Orient, in deliberate and conscious contradiction to such ideas, or whether it arose quite independently of them among the early Kabbalists. In any event, the *Bahir*’s doctrine of old and new souls, here taken for granted, contrasts strongly with the Catharist view, propagated in Languedoc in southern France at the time of publication of the *Bahir*. The emergence of new souls is, after all, viewed here as a special merit occurring when the community of Israel proves itself worthy, an altogether different notion from the pessimistic doctrine of the Catharists according to which all souls in this world are actually fallen spirits. These early *Bahir* passages concerning transmigration have a very special and independent flavor of their own, in contrast with what we know of Catharist doctrine concerning this point.

The *Bahir* passage about new and old souls is then elucidated in a lengthy and rather strange parable (S §127; M §184):

To what is this comparable? To a king who had an army, and sends them a great deal of bread to eat. But they were lazy and did not eat it, nor did they take care for it, and it turned moldy and was wasted. He came to inquire and to observe whether they had food to eat, and whether they had eaten what he had sent them. When he found that they had moldy bread, they were embarrassed to ask for other bread, saying: This we have not cared for, shall we ask for other? The king was also angered, and took the moldy bread, ordering that it be dried and restored as far as possible, and swore to these people: I will not give you other bread until you eat all of this moldy bread. . . . What did they do? They decided to divide the bread, and each one took his portion; he who was alert stored his portion up above [literally, in the air] and ate well; another took it and ate what he ate with appetite, leaving the rest down below and not storing it, because he had given up on it. And it got worse and become moldy, and he was unable to eat it at all, and remained hungry until he died. His own sin is visited upon him. [He is asked:] Why did you kill yourself? Not only did you spoil the bread initially, and I returned it to you restored and you divided it; but you spoiled your portion and were negligent in guarding it; not only that, but you have killed yourself! And he answered: Sir, what should I have done? And he commanded him: You ought to have stored it properly; and if you say that you could not, you should have paid heed to your friend and your neighbor who divided the bread with you, observing their actions and their way of storing it, and attempted to store it like them.

Here, too, in a rather bizarre image, we find the idea that in every generation the same souls descend, and only after they have been purged of all their sins and “staleness” can new souls be brought down. (Incidentally, the wordy and awkward style of some of these parables is rather surprising, contrasting markedly with the laconic language of the parables of the talmudic aggadah.)

In the passages discussed above, the *Bahir* sees transmigration as a law of the widest validity, at least insofar as Israel is concerned. Only on rare occasions do new souls descend into the world; on the whole, we are dealing exclusively, with “old” souls. In the circle of Provençal Kabbalists, it was said that Isaac the Blind (ca. 1200), the most important mystic in this group, “could tell by a person’s face whether he was from the new or the old [souls].” As he was blind, we may assume that this “looking” alludes to the ability to perceive the “aura” surrounding an individual.¹⁷ Any restriction of metempsychosis to categories of deeds (such as punishment for particular sins) is completely unknown in the *Bahir*; likewise, it does not detail the circumstances or conditions of the wandering of the soul.

II

Among the thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalists the doctrine of transmigration underwent a very strange development. We find here various tendencies that obviously conflict with one another, suggesting a profound inner tension within this set of ideas. This applies not only to the theory of metempsychosis to be outlined here, but also to the form in which this doctrine was presented. While *Sefer ha-Bahir* had no qualms or opposition to expressing this esoteric theory, albeit chiefly in parables, an important change took place in this respect among the early Spanish Kabbalists. In the writings of the Kabbalists of Gerona and their disciples, who exerted the major influence on Spanish Kabbalah, the doctrine of transmigration appears only in hints and allusions, being treated as a profound mystery. In Nahmanides’ words: “It is one of the hidden mysteries of the Torah, except for those who have received it by a tradition. It is forbidden to expound it in writing, and useless to talk about it in allusions.”¹⁸ Not a single one of these authors so much as attempts to present a halfway lucid or detailed explanation of this doctrine.

The reason for this self-restraint, which was not abandoned until the end of the thirteenth century, is not at all clear. What dangers could lurk in the teaching of this doctrine, which is now understood as one of the

great mysteries of the Torah? Were the Kabbalists perhaps trying to avoid a debate with the philosophical opponents of the doctrine? This hardly seems likely, for if so, the enigmatic terseness of their statements would be bound to arouse the curiosity and interest of the uninitiated. I have been unable to find any satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon. After all, Judaism, unlike the Catholic Church, had no magisterium that would have officially condemned this doctrine; thus, there was no danger of that sort involved in advocating this idea. Certainly, a figure of the unusual authority that Nahmanides enjoyed in his own lifetime would not need to heed such considerations; as he was certainly cool to philosophical inquiry per se, fear of philosophical debate would have been the last thing to keep him from articulating his thorough rejection of the philosophers' views.

The riddle becomes doubly opaque when we recall that the early Kabbalists found in the doctrine of transmigration a solution to the problem of the suffering of the righteous posed by the Book of Job. Nahmanides wrote an entire commentary to Job, finding the key to the book in this very doctrine, which, according to him, is alluded to in Elihu's discourses to Job. Yet never once does this commentary clearly articulate or even name this doctrine! It does not even use the term *sod ha-'ibbur* ("the mystery of passage"),¹⁹ which was generally employed in his circle to describe the theory of transmigration (at least in conjunction with other mysteries). He speaks only of a "great mystery," or of the "level" (*middah*) found here—a rather vague word by which to hint at the matter under discussion. All questions of theodicy, and especially those of the suffering of the righteous and the good fortune of the wicked, are answered by the doctrine of transmigration. Certain biblical verses—altogether different from those quoted in Oriental sources—serve as key verses that supposedly hint at this doctrine.²⁰ In particular, the institution of levirate marriage (the obligation to marry one's brother's widow should his brother die childless; Deut. 25:5–10) was explained in terms of the doctrine of transmigration:²¹ the first-born son of such a marriage was seen as a reincarnation of the deceased. According to this notion, only a close kinsman could offer the proper help in enabling the deceased to be reincarnated as his widow's child. Thus, we have here the first, albeit feeble,

indication that a certain sympathetic relationship between the souls plays a part in reincarnation.

In striking contrast to the reluctant manner in which this explanation of levirate marriage was first offered, the idea was developed with great thoroughness and detail in the 1280s in a section of the *Zohar* specifically devoted to it.²² Here, too, the presentation is accompanied by lengthy and grandiloquent exclamations about the profundity and mystery of this subject; nevertheless, this does not prevent the author from saying what he has to about the topic. Henceforth, the door is wide open to discussion of transmigration, which is generally designated by a new term, *gilgul*,²³ and becomes further elaborated and crystallized in the numerous discussions devoted to it in Kabbalistic circles.

Two tendencies are clearly discernible in the evolution of this doctrine. One tendency sought to restrict the scope of metempsychosis as much as possible—a tendency diametrically opposed to that of the *Bahir*. According to this view, not all souls transmigrate, and not all human deeds necessarily require the reincarnation of a given individual in a different body. Transmigration is seen instead as the consequence of very specific human actions—namely, those connected with the sexual realm and with procreation. Transmigration is restricted most drastically by the author of the main part of the *Zohar* and the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, for whom—as a careful analysis of his various utterances reveals—only a childless man²⁴ and, under certain circumstances, his wife, are subject to metempsychosis. One who has failed to fulfill this first and most fundamental law of the Torah, “to be fruitful and multiply,” must return to the world a second time in order to do so. In particular, one who has, by his own decision and because of his reprehensible practices, ignored the obligation of reproduction, must take on the torment of wandering,²⁵ which, while offering a chance to correct what he has done, also involves agony and suffering. All other sins are atoned for by the punishments of Purgatory; this offense alone, by an inevitable and immanent logic, carries the penalty of reincarnation: the man who does not want to give the world any children must come back himself.

Somewhat less extreme is the limitation of transmigration to those who have transgressed against one of the thirty-six commandments of

the Torah carrying the punishment of *karet* (extermination of the soul). The soul must transmigrate in order to avoid this punishment and to be restored to its ultimate mystical roots, from which it was “cut off.” The vast majority of offenses for which the Torah stipulates such a punishment are sexual; thus, even in this expansion, transmigration is limited to a specific, albeit very central, realm of human transgression. In the generation following the appearance of the *Zohar*, around 1300, this view was developed in an entirely different direction by a number of Kabbalists, especially by R. Joseph of Hamadan and by the anonymous author of *Sefer Ta‘amei ha-Mitsvot*. This latter work, which was widely circulated in a number of anonymous manuscripts, is evidently connected to R. Joseph; two hundred years later, the sixteenth-century Kabbalist of Salonica, R. Isaac ibn Farhi, falsely claimed authorship of this work for himself.²⁶ This work speaks of the idea of reincarnation in animal bodies, a notion to which I shall return later.

From the very outset the tendency to limit transmigration to very specific categories is accompanied by a different, growing tendency to widen its applicability. Here, too, of course, there are initially certain restrictions. They are connected with the division of human beings, customary in Jewish ethics, into three groups: the pious or righteous, the evildoers, and the middling or mediocre (*beinonim*). The righteous are not subjected at all to transmigration, but immediately achieve bliss in the World to Come. Opinions were divided about the applicability of this law for the other two groups. Nearly all of the early Kabbalists agreed that it applies in principle to the wicked and the sinners—who, in the sober and hardheaded view of the moralists, constitute the majority of human beings, including the Jewish people in Exile. Hence, the Catalan Kabbalist R. Sheshet des Mercadell, a disciple of Nahmanides, wrote a highly interesting treatise on questions concerning this doctrine.²⁷ His point of departure is that only the evildoers are subject to transmigration. Divine love and severity thus balance out one another; by saving their souls from obliteration in the fires of Hell, God performs an act of mercy, giving them a chance to cleanse themselves by a new, though agonizing transmigration: “We find that this attribute is not [applied] for certain save upon the sinning soul, which is deserving to be destroyed and lost, and

He thought a way that none might escape.” This view was probably originally the dominant one. The middling people, in whom merit and guilt are evenly balanced, are sentenced by the celestial court to Hell, which in the view of this Kabbalist is preferable to transmigration (Hell or Gehinnom in medieval Jewish theology had the role of a purgatory, for a limited period of time).

But for many Kabbalists, the realm of *gilgul* was rapidly expanded to include the middling people (*beinonim*) as well;²⁸ it is no longer restricted to the childless or to transgressors of the Torah’s sexual code. Even R. Sheshet, whose inquiries evince a deep, rationalistic disquiet about this entire set of ideas and who makes obvious efforts to limit their application, polemicizes against the above restriction. He also expresses the opinion, found in a number of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sources, that God occasionally sends even completely righteous people back to the world, although not as punishment for their offenses, but for their own good (for example, in order to fulfill a certain commandment that they might have been unable to fulfill in their first lifetime) or—and this is the chief reason—for the good of the entire world.²⁹ They may also undergo transmigration for minor sins, but will then die young.³⁰

The number of transmigrations for the purging of sin is generally limited to three (i.e., subsequent to the original entrance of the soul into a body), an idea supported by Job (33:29–30): “Lo, all these things doth God work, twice, yea thrice, with a man. To bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of the living.”³¹ If the soul failed to take advantage of these opportunities to correct itself, and returned to its evil path in each of these lives, it is finally condemned to Hell.³² A few Kabbalists reversed this sequence, having the soul first receive its reward or punishment in Paradise or Hell and thereafter be sent off on a new migration.³³ Obviously, the fundamental contradiction between the two ideas—retribution by means of the afterlife and retribution by means of transmigration—could not be logically resolved; it added an element of vacillation and uncertainty to the Kabbalistic conceptions. A similar ambiguity is found in certain Indian doctrines, in which the radical perception of transmigration as an immanent consequence of human action (*karma*) is weakened by the relegation of purga-

tion and purification to the afterlife. But while the wicked or even the middling—insofar as they were subject to the law of transmigration—were restricted to three reincarnations, no limit was placed upon the number of possible *gilgulim* of the righteous, whose transmigrations were dictated by divine decree for the benefit of the entire world.³⁴

In contrast to the main portion of the *Zohar*, which attempts, as we have said, to restrict *gilgul* as much as possible, the opposite trend was expressed around this time or shortly thereafter in two groups of Kabbalistic literary documents: the writings of the students of R. Solomon ben Abraham Adret (Rashba, the most important disciple of Nahmanides) during the first third of the fourteenth century; and the later parts of the Zoharic literature, the *Ra'aya Mehemna* (The Loyal Shepherd) and *Tikkunei Zohar*, written by an anonymous author. The latter's teachings on many subjects, including transmigration, deviate widely from the main part of the *Zohar*. In all of these texts, *gilgul* becomes more and more a universal law, as the restrictions on its applicability gradually diminish. Only the perfect *Tsaddik*—in a manner not unlike the enlightened being of Buddhism—is exempt from this law; however, he too can return to the world, like the *bodhisattva* of Mahayana Buddhism, to commiserate with its lot and in order to help it. Here, too, we find an altogether similar development in two historically unconnected systems.

III

There are many new ideas in these post-Zoharic writings, several of which we shall now discuss. These ideas, linked to a progressively more detailed and complicated development of the doctrine of transmigration, are of fundamental importance to the doctrine itself; while they hark back to the school of Gerona, they are fully developed only here.

First, we must mention the theme of the chain or chains of transmigrations. Alongside the tendency to see metempsychosis as a solution to the problem of theodicy, we find the growth of another distinct view—its use as a key to the understanding of sacred history and the hidden dynamics within Scripture. The Kabbalists were interested, not only in

the general principle, whose specific applications were difficult to define, but in the specific, “concrete” connections between biblical figures. Close examination of various biblical characters suggested to them parallel or even complementary correspondence in their actions or qualities. There thus arose, initially short, but gradually longer and longer chains of persons who were regarded as linked by the secret process of *gilgul*.

Already in the early Kabbalah, the beginning of these chains was found in the tale of Cain and Abel, which gave the Kabbalists a great deal of food for thought. Why was Abel, the tranquil shepherd, slain by his brother? Had he sinned in some way? The old answer—*cherchez la femme*—according to which they had fought over Abel’s twin sister, was spiritually rather unsatisfying. The mystics taught that Abel had not observed the appropriate limits when he made his sacrifice, but experienced an impure and confused vision of the *Shekhinah*, and thereby distorted his relationship with the Divine.³⁵ He thereafter needed to undergo transmigration, and his soul was reborn in Moses who, as a shepherd in Midian, again had a vision of the *Shekhinah* in the burning bush, this time in a pure form: “For this reason it mentions here, ‘And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God’ [Exod. 3:6]—that he had already looked, like a person who is embarrassed by what has already happened to him.”³⁶ In other words, a certain knowledge of the connections of his soul was operating at that moment (a connection usually regarded by the Kabbalists as unconscious); here Moses was attempting to correct what he had formerly harmed in his contemplation of the Godhead. Moreover, just as Abel found his *tikkun*, i.e., the mending of his being, in Moses, so did the soul of the fratricide Cain return in Jethro, the priest of Midian and Moses’ father-in-law. Indeed, the Torah refers to him in one place as a Cainite, because Cain found his *tikkun* through him: the pagan priest of Midian, together with his household, converted to the true worship of God, and the murderer of his own brother was reborn as his loyal advisor. The priest’s daughter, given in marriage to Moses, was Abel’s twin sister, who had been destined to be Abel’s wife and was snatched away by Cain.³⁷ The woman who had once turned the two brothers against each other now became the source of the bond and harmony between them.

From the *Tikkunei Zohar* on, connections of this sort begin to form a

major part of Kabbalistic exegesis. Many such links were subsequently posited by Kabbalistic visionaries, who claimed the ability to perceive the earlier histories of the souls of their contemporaries. Other Kabbalists claimed that Cain, or his untamed evil element, recurred in the rebellious Korah;³⁸ Terah, Abraham's idolatrous father, was said to have been reborn in Job;³⁹ and so forth.

An important role is played in Kabbalistic theory by one of these chains, reminiscent of the doctrine of the Jewish-Christian Ebionite sect concerning the true prophet, who supposedly reappears throughout the present aeon in various figures from Adam to Christ.⁴⁰ The emergence of this idea in the 1280s is very remarkable, as the earlier Kabbalists explicitly described the soul of the Messiah as a "new" one, that had never previously appeared in the world, as seen in our analysis of the relevant *Bahir* passages. R. Moses de Leon (not in the *Zohar*, but in one of his Hebrew texts) was the first to claim a connection between the souls of Adam, David, and the Messiah.⁴¹ The consonants in Adam's name are read as an acronym for the names of the three bearers of this one soul—*Adam, David, Mashiah*. Kabbalistic literature is filled with discussions of this transmigration chain. At times this chain also includes Moses, the redeemer of Israel from its first Exile.⁴² But while the Jewish-Christian sources of the Pseudo-Clementine works knew nothing of Adam's sin, and the chain of prophets running from Adam to Christ does not indicate any progress, the Kabbalists focus quite intensely on Adam's fall. Adam's transgression at the beginning of Creation is repaired by Moses, the lawgiver, by David, who established a throne for the *Shekhinah*, and will ultimately be perfected by the Messiah. The complementary relationship between the Fall and the Redemption, a notion first expressed by St. Paul and which also occupied the talmudic aggadah, is now given a Kabbalistic formulation in the doctrine of the transmigration of the Messiah's soul: the man who missed humanity's great chance in Paradise is the same one who will ultimately bring about its realization. The situation of Adam, Eve, and the serpent reappears in various guises throughout these transmigrations, each time needing to be overcome. An important Kabbalist of the late Middle Ages offered a highly dramatic retelling of the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah from this perspective. Paradoxically, David

comes off a great deal better in this esoteric explanation than one might expect from the biblical tale:

King David, of blessed memory, was a great sage and recognized transmigrations. When he saw Uriah the Hittite, he knew that he was the Serpent who had seduced Eve, and when he saw Bathsheba he knew that she was Eve, and he knew that he himself was Adam. Thus, he wished to take Bathsheba from Uriah, because she was [destined to be] David's mate. . . . And the reason Nathan the prophet chastised him was because he hastened, and did not wait. . . . For his haste caused him to go to her without performing *tikkun* (restoration), for he first needed to remove from her the contamination of the Serpent, and thereafter to go to her, and he did not do so. Therefore, his first son from Bathsheba died, for he was from the impurity of the Serpent, but from there on there was no Satan and no bad effect.⁴³

In *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* (end of §61), Adam's reincarnation in Moses is clearly alluded to, albeit in the context of transferring Abel's sin onto Adam, and without any relation to the transmigrations of the Redeemer and of the Messiah: " 'And Moses hid his face'—for he remembered what had happened to him before; he remembered his sin and covered himself in shame," similar to Adam's behavior after the sin.

During the same period that this theory about Adam appeared, other authors employed acrostics of biblical names in connection with the incarnations associated with them; hence, I do not believe that Moses de Leon's doctrine reflected an old tradition. It seems more likely that this was an internal development among the Kabbalists themselves who, with a certain logic, applied the theory of transmigration to biblical history and theology.

A further step taken by Kabbalistic psychology in regard to the problem under discussion involves the doctrine of the soul sparks. Evidently, this doctrine first arose (before 1240) in connection with eschatological questions. If the soul is indeed one and indivisible (which was still the conception at the beginning of the Kabbalah, soon to give way to far

more complicated ideas) then one might readily ask: what will become of the various bodies through which a soul has passed when the dead are resurrected? Can one assume, as several Kabbalists did, that only the last body, in which the soul finally proved itself worthy and righteous, will be physically resurrected? The objections to this solution, in terms of divine justice, which does not begrudge the reward of any creature, were obvious: as the previous bodies had also been the instruments of certain good actions, how could they be ignored at the Last Judgment as though they had never existed? Such questions were resolved by the new doctrine of soul sparks. Just as one candle can light several others, the soul, which is the light of God, can be divided into different parts that animate other bodies: "How will the soul be, which came in two or three bodies? And he quoted them as saying that the soul multiplies into several parts, just as the candle makes several sparks, and serves in all the bodies."⁴⁴ It was in this sense that some people said that the soul becomes pregnant, as it were, reproducing itself in the sparks radiating from it. This concept yielded a new meaning for the term *sod ha-ʿibbur*: i.e., literally, "the mystery of pregnancy."

But such a notion of the soul need not necessarily be tied to an eschatological perspective. Under certain conditions these sparks (*nitsotsoth*) of the soul's light-substance can achieve an existence of their own even prior to the Redemption and Resurrection. True, in so doing they may not preserve their original individual identity; on the other hand, there thereby emerges the idea of a deeper connection among such soul sparks. We will again encounter this idea in the theory of sympathy among souls, but it can already be documented from the thirteenth century. Particularly bizarre is its use in the following brief fragment, composed no later than the end of the thirteenth century:

Know that the soul is never reincarnated alone, save in the case, Heaven forbid, of a totally wicked soul, whose body had never done a single good deed—then does his soul come back to transmigrate. But as for the middling person (*beinoni*), whose body has performed many commandments, his situation is thus: sparks of his soul remain behind [i.e., in Paradise] in accordance with the command-

ments he has performed; but the other parts enter into transmigration. This portion of his soul then comes mixed with the soul of a different reincarnate, who is in the same situation as he, or with [several] transmigrating souls, as mentioned. But then they do not enter [the new body] by themselves, but with a new soul. And this is what is meant by the verse "All these things doth God work, twice, yea thrice, with a man" [Job 33:29]—that is, two or three souls at once in one soul. But it must be "with a man"—that is, with a new soul that has not yet sinned. But more than three cannot come together, as is said: "For three transgressions of Israel, Yea, for four, I will not reverse it" [Amos 2:6].⁴⁵

We thus find here a distinct shift in the conception of the soul and its wanderings. Specifically the in-between souls, certainly a large group, are those who receive a new soul each time; this flatly contradicts the view that, generally speaking, all the souls now in the world are transmigrations, and that only very rarely does a new soul descend. But a more important idea is announced here, one that plays a crucial role in the notion of the human personality in subsequent Kabbalistic psychology: namely, that a human being may, under certain circumstances, acquire sparks of various different souls. This idea not only applies to abnormal or exceptional cases, in which schizoid manifestations of the soul could be explained by this theory. It applies precisely to the mediocre, who represent here primarily a moral category, and certainly not the more extreme, peripheral psychological types. According to this theory, the unity of the soul is maintained by the fact that the transmigrating sparks of other souls combine with the soul in such a close manner that it cannot be detected by the consciousness. The real soul is the new soul, but it can carry other soul sparks along with it. One cannot deny that, in terms of this conception, the unity of a specific individual soul may become highly problematical. As we learn from the subsequent development of this theory among the Kabbalists of Safed, these sparks generally strengthen certain tendencies within the soul, because they attempt to attain, in the present life and through the medium of the new soul, that which they have previously lacked. This view, while occurring only spo-

radically in the earlier Kabbalah, forms a bridge to later developments that are central to our subject.

The extent to which the doctrine of sparks was capable of further expansion is already evidenced among some of the Spanish Kabbalists in their theories that the souls of animals (it is unclear whether of all animals or only of certain species) may be sparks of human souls.⁴⁶ This does not refer to the doctrine—generated independently—of the transmigration of human souls into animal bodies; rather, the soul of the animal itself is thought of as the spark of a human soul. This idea is connected in turn with the theory of the hierarchical structure of the human soul, which we shall now discuss.

We now come to a further point of cardinal importance. In the Middle Ages various forms of Platonic psychology with its tripartite division of the soul were accepted; the Kabbalists borrowed these forms, adding a special twist of their own. Some of these philosophers identified the “vegetative soul” with the biblical *nefesh* (life soul), the “animal soul” or “vital soul” with the biblical *ruah* (spirit), and the “speaking soul” or “rational soul” with the *neshamah*. In their adaptation of this scheme, in which Aristotelian and Platonic ideas mingled freely, the Kabbalists gave it an entirely different character. Only a soul in its perfect state—that is, one that had realized the Torah and its mysteries—could possess three parts. The normal psychophysical constitution of a human being is already included in full on the lowest level, *nefesh*. In other words, the *nefesh* itself already encompassed the three “preparations,” “potentialities,” or “parts” (the terminology depended upon the various philosophical schools that inspired the Kabbalists). The two higher levels of the soul, *ruah* and *neshamah*, are intuitive degrees or levels of the soul, achieved by the mystics only after much practice and contemplation of the secrets of the Torah. Everyone is born with a *nefesh*, but whether or not he will succeed in bringing down his own *ruah* and *neshamah* from the treasure-house of souls, or some other heavenly source where these higher forms of his own soul abide, depends upon his own choice and spiritual development.

This theory evolved in the thirteenth century, independently from the theory of transmigration. Inevitably, however, there arose the question of

the relationship of these three parts of the soul to the problem of *gilgul*, especially insofar as *ruah* and *neshamah* were understood as autonomous spiritual realities. This question was suggested in particular by the way in which this mystical psychology was developed in the *Zohar*, which states that the three forms have separate existences even in their heavenly spheres, uniting in a spiritual alliance only under certain conditions. The question arises in the *Tikkunei Zohar*. Indeed, insofar as I can judge, whenever the *Zohar* speaks of *gilgul*, it always refers to the migration of the *nefesh*—i.e., the lowest and most basic component of the human soul—even if referred to by a different name.⁴⁷ The highest level of the soul, *neshamah*, attained only by the mystics, is explained in the main part of the *Zohar* as intrinsically incapable of sin and untouched by it; when a human being sins, the *neshamah* leaves him. Therefore, it could easily be viewed as free from metempsychosis. If a person has not merited the realization of these higher forms in his previous existence, he may be expected to return to this world in order to realize the complete structure of his soul in all its forms. Indeed, this is the view taught by the *Ra'aya Mehemna* (*Zohar*, III, 178b). However, the author goes even further, stating that all three—*nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah*—are subject to transmigration, and under certain circumstances may even transmigrate separately. He even knows of certain signs in the voice and in the creases of the forehead by which the initiate may infer the history of such migrations of the three parts.⁴⁸ The ideal case, to be sure, is one in which a man is allowed to unite with the two higher parts of his soul in a different incarnation;⁴⁹ he generally succeeds only in attaining in their stead those higher degrees that come to him from other transmigrating souls—assuming he gets that far. We thus find here an entirely different view of the nature of the *ruah* and the *neshamah*. They, too, in order to preserve and fully develop their perfection, need to transmigrate through this world. Only thereafter can each part return to the place from which it emanated. The author of *Tikkunei Zohar* uses the same verse from the Book of Job, whose interpretation regarding the doctrine of soul sparks we saw earlier, in support of this special conception. A man can undergo transmigration with two or three of his soul forms, or else can attract them in the course of his *gilgul*.⁵⁰

However, the author of *Tikkunei Zohar* developed another new theory, which acquired major importance in the history of these ideas. The primal shape of man corresponds to the mystical shape of the Godhead, as represented in the *’Adam de-’Atsiluth*, the primal human figure in the world of the *Sefiroth*. Everything in man, each of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, corresponds to one of the supernal lights, as these are arranged in the structure of the *Shi’ur Komah*, the primal shape of the highest manifestation of God. Man’s task is to bring his own true shape to its highest spiritual perfection, to develop the divine image within himself. This is done by observing the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments of the Torah, each one of which is linked to one of the organs of the human body, and hence to one of those supernal lights. Whoever fulfills the Torah properly makes his body into a dwelling place for the *Shekhinah*. But a person must undergo *gilgul* for every limb that does not become a “Throne for the *Shekhinah*”—that is, for every commandment that a man fails to observe or prohibition that he transgresses—until he has carried out his original task. The crucial passage in the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* reads:

Man performs the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, building a building for Him in this world, albeit only a temporary one. But the Holy One, blessed be He, builds man a building for all generations in His world. Happy is he who lets Him dwell in every single organ of his body, making himself a place for Him to dwell there, and making Him king over every single organ, so that no organ within him is empty of Him. For if there is even one organ in which the Holy One, blessed be He, does not dwell, then he will be brought back into the world in reincarnation because of this organ, until he becomes perfected in his parts, that all of them may be perfect in the image of the Holy One, blessed be He. For if one is lacking, he is not in the image of the Holy One, blessed be He.⁵¹

In this view of the human calling, which made a deep impact on the Kabbalists, Adam’s sin clearly became the center of the doctrine of transmigration. It was Adam who had injured man’s primal image so thor-

oughly that it could only be restored to its original perfection by a long series of transmigrations. Adam's reincarnations through his children and his children's children is matched by a process in the Sefirotic world, by means of which the true image of Primal Man, *'Adam Kadmon*, is developed and built in its own true shape on the various levels of divine emanation. We are told that Adam sinned in thought, word, and deed, thus harming God's very thought in which the *'Adam Kadmon* was emitted at the very beginning of the emanation of all the *Sefiroth*. Thus, the author of *Tikkunei Zohar* allegorically portrays the reconstruction of the corrected image of *'Adam Kadmon* as a process of *gilgul* of divine thought, in which the "supernal drops" (used here instead of the sparks of light) descend from level to level. The transmigration of souls from one body to another in our material world hence corresponds to the hidden process of *gilgul* within the divine world itself. This involves the letters of the Divine Name, each one of which is such a "drop": "There is no *Sefirah* in the Supernal Adam [*'Adam 'Ila'i*], which is *Yod Heh Vav Heh*, which does not itself transmigrate."⁵² In other words, transmigration here below is identical to the process of emanation itself!

Even without speaking explicitly of the sparks of his soul,⁵³ the detailed reflections by the author of *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* on Adam's reincarnations in Abel, in the patriarchs, and so on, leave no doubt that the soul is not fully present in each of its transmigrations in its indivisible substantiality, but only in the form of mere fragments, which become attached to souls in our world. In these terms it is not surprising that the author should also speak of *gilgulim* of the righteous,⁵⁴ not all of whom fulfilled the Torah from beginning to end in equal measure. I will not undertake a detailed study of these ideas here, but will note in passing that, like the Kabbalists of Gerona, *Tikkunei Zohar* explains the infertility of a man or woman as resulting from an exchange of souls in the course of transmigration: a female soul born in a man or a male soul in a woman will render the bearer barren.⁵⁵

In the main portion of the *Zohar*, as well as in other writings of that period, a further important idea is introduced. In the original usage of the early Kabbalists, the terms *gilgul* and *'ibbur* overlapped; diverse explanations were offered as to why the doctrine of transmigration was at-

tached to the concept of "pregnancy" or "impregnation."⁵⁶ Toward the end of the thirteenth century the two terms began to be differentiated, with a special meaning given to the concept of *'ibbur*. Not all migrating souls enter the new body at the moment of conception or of birth; sometimes, at special moments during the course of his life, a person receives a second soul that is, so to speak, impregnated within his own soul. This additional soul is not linked to his psychophysical organism from birth nor does it partake in its development, but it can accompany him until his death or may leave him earlier. According to the *Zohar*, the souls of certain pious figures in the Bible were impregnated with the deceased souls of other righteous men from the past at decisive moments in their lives. Hence, the soul of Judah entered that of Boaz, while those of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, entered that of Phineas.⁵⁷ It does not state that these phenomena are subject to the law of transmigration; at least with regard to Judah, who had children (unlike Nadab and Abihu, who died childless while entering the sanctuary), there is no reason for the *Zohar* to assume this. Rather, at a particular moment, and for the performance of a particular deed (such as Boaz's marriage to Ruth), a soul returns and descends (even from Paradise!) in order to strengthen and encourage another soul in the performance of a given act. This of course requires a certain kinship, either of the souls themselves, or of the situation in which the person finds himself at a given moment that repeats a moment from the life of the deceased soul.

Henceforth, beginning around 1300, the term *'ibbur* is used to designate the process taking place in a living body, as distinct from *gilgul*, which signifies the incarnation of a soul in a body from the moment of conception. The consensus among the Spanish Kabbalists was that *'ibbur* occurs only to the souls of the righteous, while the wicked are subject to the law of *gilgul*. Insofar as a righteous person may need to atone for a minor offense, he may be given the opportunity to do so by means of *'ibbur*, entering into the body of a person at the exact moment that he is performing a commandment that the deceased person failed to observe. The phenomenon of *'ibbur* struck many Kabbalists as particularly plausible in explaining the return of a righteous man, not for his own benefit, but in order to help his generation or in connection with certain events,

so as to strengthen the tendency toward holiness and goodness in the world. Only much later did they speak of a “bad ‘ibbur” as well, in which the soul of a wicked person entered the body of a living person, who had allowed it to enter by committing some serious transgression.⁵⁸ While the ‘ibbur of the righteous soul is revealed in a heightening of the personality and a strengthening of its good tendencies, the “evil ‘ibbur” can destroy the personality entirely: “And that soul was impregnated within him to strengthen him in his wickedness, until he passes away from the world.”⁵⁹ The Kabbalists explained the phenomenon of possession in this way: a wandering soul that has not yet found a body takes control of a person and disrupts or shatters him. This phenomenon was known thereafter as a *dibbuk*—a term, incidentally, that never occurs in Kabbalist literature, but owes its existence to Yiddish folk usage from the seventeenth century on, where it appears as a contraction for “an attachment (*dibbuk*) from the outside forces,” i.e., the evil spirits.⁶⁰

At times this process of ‘ibbur was limited to the sparks emanating from the souls of the righteous, their basic existence remaining untouched thereby. R. David ibn Abi Zimra explains:

I asked one of the sages of the Kabbalah what the difference was between *gilgul* and ‘ibbur. He replied that the term ‘ibbur (“impregnation”) implies a mystery: just as a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth without lacking anything [of her own being], so too the souls of the righteous and the pious become pregnant and give birth and emanate sparks into this world, to protect the generation or for some other reasons, like one who lights one candle from another, where the first candle is not diminished.⁶¹

‘Ibbur is here transformed into a kind of radiation entering into the world, helping to support and sustain it.

The notion of groups or families of souls first emerges in connection with the Kabbalistic interpretation of levirate marriage. It seems to have originated in the anonymous late-thirteenth-century work *Sefer Ta‘amei ha-Mitsvoth*, in which we read:

Know that every family in the fellowship of Israel represents a tree in Paradise, and is a branch of the Tree of Life, and is a limb in the celestial *Merkavah* (the uppermost world of the *Sefiroth*). Therefore, consanguinity alludes to unity, for the entire family is one unit; hence, the Torah states: “the fathers shall not be put to death for the children” [Deut. 24:16], for all of them are as one limb. That is why, if one of the brothers dies, the second brother is obligated to sustain and strengthen him, to put moisture into that broken branch. But if the one falls and there is no second to life him up [cf. Eccles. 4:10], then that tree is uprooted in Paradise and that branch from the Tree of Life, and that limb of the *Merkavah* leaves no mark. Therefore, if one of the brothers dies and his wife comes before his brother for levirate marriage, he strengthens its nature, and that branch that had been cut off from that tree in Paradise, which is the family, grows again. For the dead of each and every family of the fellowship of Israel are like the roots of a tree, and its branches are the living, for the living exist by virtue of the merits of the dead.⁶²

R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi wrote a few years later in his *Perishath Parashath Bereshith*:

The tree of each soul of the children of Israel is planted in the supernal Garden of Eden, in the *Tifereth* of the Tree of Life, and against it is planted the Tree of Knowledge in the garden. And the Tree of Knowledge receives from the birds that dwell on the branches of the Tree of Life, until they dwell in the branches of the Tree of Knowledge. And there these birds build their nests and go out to act by breeding—that is, the supernal souls.⁶³

It seems likely that it was from this source, which he must have known, that R. Solomon Alkabez (ca. 1550) developed the theory that the souls themselves divide into families. This idea also appears in the writings of his disciple and brother-in-law, R. Moses Cordovero: “ ‘This is the book of the generations of man’ [Gen. 5:1]—the course of the

devolution of souls into families through their generations; that is, that they are of various sorts and communities.”⁶⁴ Thereafter, in Lurianic Kabbalah, this notion was detached from its original biological framework and applied to the interconnection of the soul sparks.

The last major point in the development of this concept in medieval Kabbalah is that of the transmigration of souls into animal bodies, or even into lower forms of existence. This last doctrine was subject to great controversy among the Spanish Kabbalists. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Johannes Reuchlin, who produced the first serious presentation of Kabbalah for a non-Jewish audience (1517), knew nothing of this doctrine.⁶⁵ Indeed, just a few years later, H. Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim reports that the Jewish Kabbalists do not believe in reincarnation in animals.⁶⁶ In point of fact, these scholars knew nothing of what was going on among contemporary Kabbalists. At that very time, the majority of Kabbalists accepted this theory, as is witnessed even by Kabbalists who opposed it, such as Judah Hayyat, who wrote in Mantua in the early sixteenth century.⁶⁷

Sefer ha-Bahir only knew of reincarnation of souls in human bodies, and especially of Jewish souls. One hundred years later nearly all Kabbalists, at least in their writings, are still silent about reincarnation in animals, although we must assume that in certain groups this theory was already being propagated verbally. It is difficult to determine whether this was due to the influence of Catharist teachings or to an independent, internal development within the Kabbalah.⁶⁸ Plainly, no further explanation is required for the fact that such a theory of transmigration—i.e., the descent of the soul into a lower form of existence than it had previously had—must have been highly problematical for many Kabbalists, contradicting their basic tendency to understand *gilgul* as a process of purgation and improvement of souls. Nevertheless, a few Kabbalists did accept this idea, seeing reincarnation in animals as a form of atonement for certain particularly serious sins. Beginning around 1300 this idea even crops up in a number of authoritative Kabbalistic writings, but it is always restricted to animals, and not to lower life forms. Such a wandering never constitutes an advance or ascent from the animal to the human world,

but rather, in line with the idea of its being a punishment for the soul, an abasement from the human to the animal.⁶⁹ Among some Kabbalists, such as in the above-mentioned *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitsvoth*, this theory was related to the Levitical commandments concerning animal sacrifices. The verse "When any man of you bringeth an offering to the Lord" (Lev. 1:2) was construed as "He was from among you, and now he is an animal."⁷⁰ The offenses of the transmigrated soul are thus expiated by being brought as a sacrifice. The rules concerning the ritual slaughter of animals and related regulations for easing the animal's sufferings were likewise related to this doctrine.

There were, however, more radical forms of this theory. Souls may be reincarnated, not only in "pure" animals (i.e., those that the Torah sanctions for consumption), but even in unclean animals, game, and fowl, listed, for example, in the works of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi and R. Menahem Recanati. Moreover, the Kabbalists introduced the notion that the limit to three transmigrations, inferred from Job 33:29, applied only to transmigrations in human bodies. Thereafter, those souls of the wicked who had not taken advantage of their opportunity to perfect themselves sink down into animal bodies, to endure the intense torments of estrangement and being cut off. The soul can then rise again only after long expiatory wanderings.⁷¹ This tendency was carried to its greatest lengths by R. Joseph of Hamadan, a Kabbalist who migrated from Persia to Spain in the fourteenth century, who equated reincarnation in animals with the sufferings in Hell. Such a mystical, nonliteral interpretation of Gehinnom is however very rare in Kabbalistic literature.⁷²

While the author of the main part of the *Zohar* completely ignores this conception, the author of *Ra'aya Mehemna* and *Tikkunei Zohar* certainly must have known about it, as he interprets it mystically, with a clearly polemical aim:

When a person is born, he is given a soul from the side of the animal which is on the side of purity, of that side called *ofanei ha-kodesh* ("the holy wheels.") If he merited it, he is given a soul (*ruah*) from the side of the "holy creatures."

But if he needs to undergo *gilgul*, he may be reborn,

even in animals which are *ofanim*, or in any creatures from whence there come the souls of human beings.⁷³

What are referred to here are not earthly animals, but the four celestial animals belonging to those esoteric precincts described by Ezekiel as carrying the divine throne. The “vulgar” understanding of transmigration within animal bodies is explained as a misunderstanding of a far deeper notion concerning basic forms and characteristics of souls. We again find parallels to these statements in the interpretation of Indian theories of reincarnation; there, too, we find those, such as the well-known thinker Ananda Coomaraswamy,⁷⁴ who deny that this can actually refer to wanderings of the soul through animals.

This entire set of ideas was given a new twist at the beginning of the fourteenth century by R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, known as R. Joseph the Long, physician and Kabbalist who was well known in Spain. In two major works, entitled *Sod ha-Shelah* (the Secret of Sending) and *Din Benei Hilluf* (“those appointed to destruction” or “changing”; cf. Prov. 31:8), he tried to develop a universal theory of transmigration. According to this theory, all existing forms constantly move and change—from the highest, beginning with the *Sefiroth* and the angels, to the lowest, and from the lowest moving back up to the highest. During this process the forms themselves change, and the process is not interrupted at any point in either direction; there is thus no reason for a soul to sink back from a level it has already attained. We cannot present this theory in detail here, as this would require a very precise analysis and study, but it is clear that it is not free of inconsistencies and contradictions. These derive from the assumption that, alongside the unidirectional process of changes in form, which is the true *gilgul*, there is another process called *temuroth*, which is the migration into demonic or impure “counterforms.” During this latter process, in a manner that is not altogether clear, souls can be precipitated out, rejected, and forced to wander through all sorts of unclean and even demonic realms. This doctrine beings with transmigration from the seemingly lifeless, inert realm, into the realms of vegetation, animal, and

human life, culminating in the angelic and Sefirotic realms.⁷⁵ This does not mean, however, that the soul is enclosed and exiled in a medium foreign to its own nature; rather, the soul itself changes from form to form. This wandering is hence no longer transmigration in the strict sense of the term, but something essentially different. By including within the process of *gilgul* and *'ibbur* all levels and forms of existence, even the lowest and most elemental—as logically follows from his teaching—the author of this doctrine influenced the later development of the Kabbalistic idea of *gilgul*. The great Kabbalists of Safed, who to a large extent developed and advanced the ideas of R. Joseph, recognized him as a great authority and his influence upon them is evident.

IV

From the middle of the sixteenth century—influenced by the profound mystical reinterpretation of Judaism that originated in Safed, the holy city of the Kabbalists, and spreading from there to the entire Jewish world—the doctrine of transmigration took on the form in which it had its greatest influence, achieving virtually canonical status among Kabbalists and moralists. The passionate interest shown by these groups in the theory of transmigration is certainly connected to the psychological situation of the Jewish people in this period; I have tried to shed light on this historical situation elsewhere.⁷⁶ For the purposes of the present study, however, it is crucial to define more precisely the basic conception of this psychology—or, more accurately, its anthropology. Many of the major Kabbalists of the Safed school, such as Solomon Alkabez, Moses Cordovero, Isaac Luria and his disciple Hayyim Vital [Calabrese], as well as the anonymous author of the enormous opus *Gallei Razaya* (Revelation of the Mysteries [1552], which is primarily devoted to the doctrine of transmigration) strove to formulate conceptions of *gilgul*. Visionary and clairvoyant experiences played an important role in the sometimes highly detailed elaboration and application of these ideas, particularly for Luria and for the anonymous author of *Gallei Razaya*. These mystics were on no less intimate terms with the souls of people from all the generations than

the noted eighteenth-century mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg. One finds similar projections of spiritual experiences, described here in rigorously Jewish and Kabbalistic terms, while there in clearly Christian ones. In the following discussion, I shall confine myself to the ideas of R. Isaac Luria and his school, who contributed most to the dissemination of these ideas and to the new and final shape that they later assumed in Hasidism. While Luria himself wrote nothing on this topic, the writings of his disciple Hayyim Vital cite numerous statements in his name; there can be no doubt that the fundamental approach, which is what concerns us here, was formulated by him personally. The two extant recensions of Vital's voluminous notes, *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* and *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, while diverging from one another in certain nuances and formulations, agree on all essential points.⁷⁷

The point of departure for the Lurianic doctrine is an ancient midrash, which for some reason was overlooked by the earlier Kabbalists, and was only linked to the theory of transmigration by the Kabbalists of the sixteenth century:

While Adam was yet lying lifeless (as a *golem*), the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him all the righteous who would come from his seed. There were those who hung from the head of Adam, those who hung from his hair, those from his throat, those from his two eyes, those from his nose, those from his mouth, and those from his arms.⁷⁸

The Kabbalists concluded from this that all souls, of all generations of humanity and from all nations, but especially those of Israel were incorporated within Adam's soul. Before his fall Adam was an all-encompassing cosmic being, whose soul substance was gathered from all levels of reality, from the very highest to the lowest, and fashioned into a structure reaching through all the worlds. Adam was the great soul created by God as a mirror of spiritual reality, and closely tied to all of its levels.

We must mention, of course, that this Adam, whose creation reflected the image of 'Adam Kadmon in the supernal worlds, did not possess a corporeal body as we know it prior to his sin; his "bodily" garment con-

sisted of light substance (i.e., *or*, “light,” in contrast to *‘or*, “skin,” following the events of Gen. 3:21). Adam’s nature is described in great detail.⁷⁹ According to Lurianic Kabbalah, there are five different worlds, beginning with the Godhead and ending with the lowest, but also intrinsically spiritual, world. These are: *‘Adam Kadmon* (i.e., the Sefirotic world);⁸⁰ the World of *‘Atsiluth* or Emanation; the World of *Beri’ah* or Creation (also the World of the Divine Throne); the World of *Yetsirah* or Formation (i.e., the angelic world); and the World of *‘Assiyah*, (perhaps best translated as “work completion” or “concretization”). Each of these worlds—all of which are dominated by the rhythm and structure of the ten *Sefirot*—is subdivided into five configurations or *partsufim* (literally, “countenances”). The *Sefirot* come together in these in various ways, each one of them in turn containing an infinite number of Sefirotic structures and hidden worlds. But in addition to their innermost Sefirotic substance, these five worlds also have a penumatic garment of external spiritual light emanating from the *Sefirot*, and a further, even more exteriorized, light which is “the angelic quarry from whence all the angels are hewn.”⁸¹ According to this Kabbalistic school, the holy souls clearly belong to a more inward stratum than do the angels, who derived from the “outer light” of the *Sefirot*. Unlike earlier Kabbalah, which knew of only three levels of the soul, this new Kabbalah lists five: *nefesh*, *ruah*, *neshamah*, and two more, higher soul qualities: *hayyah* and *yehidah* (these terms, abbreviated as *naran hay*, are based upon an old midrash about the five biblical names for “soul”). According to Lurianic theory, each of these five “souls” belongs to one of the five worlds. Just as each of these worlds duplicates the five-part structure of the *partsufim*, so too does the soul: each of the five soul levels is composed of five lights or qualities of the soul. The tendency of the Safed Kabbalists, particularly of Luria, to view each spiritual structure in terms of the infinite, mutual reflection of all of its elements left its mark, not only on its ontology, but also on its psychology.

In his primal disposition, the origin of the elements of his soul, and their relation to specific levels in the structure of the worlds, man was tied to the totality of the universe. There was a certain sympathy between himself and the world rooted in his spiritual makeup, whereby each individual element of his structure reflected back upon the level from

whence it came. This mutual influencing of all spheres and souls continued uninterrupted until the sympathetic contact was disrupted, albeit not completely destroyed, by Adam's sin. In order to understand what happened in and after Adam's fall, we must know how Luria conceived of Adam's further development. His approach was based upon the traditional talmudic division of man into 613 elements (248 limbs and 365 sinews or organs, as explained above). The soul is built upon the same principle, each part corresponding to one of the commandments of the Torah, it being actualized by its observance or implementation. The same structural principle was repeated here: each part of Adam constituted in itself, in its innerness, a complete configuration, a kind of primal spiritual monad, reflecting the same basic division, and itself constructed of 613 parts:

For Adam was composed of 248 limbs and 365 sinews also in the aspect of the souls that are within him, in a manner such that each part mentioned was divided into the above-mentioned order. How so? The portion of the *yehidah* (sublime soul) of *'Atsiluth* is divided into 613 organs and sinews, and each organ and sinew thereof is called one root. Likewise the *hayyah* or *neshamah* or *ruah* or *nefesh* of *'Atsiluth*—each aspect thereof is divided into 613 roots, and likewise each aspect of the five faces (*partsufim*) of *Beri'ah* is divided into 613 roots, and all of them are called *Neshamah* of *Beri'ah*, as mentioned above. . . . And these are called 613 major roots—that is to say, that less than this is impossible.

These 613 “major roots” are divided into minor roots, each one of which in turn branches off into a large number of soul sparks, all of which in their source constitute together one unity, in the same way that the branches, fruits, and leaves of a tree all have their source in the root of the tree.⁸²

The true significance of this doctrine is illustrated in Adam's fall. Had this never happened, the unity of that great primal soul that was Adam would never have been disturbed. The various lights of the soul, on their various levels and degrees, would then have continued to shine harmo-

niously upon one another, and the harmonious sympathetic ties between them and the universe as a whole would have been preserved. After all, the creation of man was intended to heal the primal Breaking of the Vessels—the original cosmic event within *’Adam Kadmon* (which I need not discuss at this point). Adam’s fall returned all the worlds to a state of disorder and confusion, once again making the repair of that break a remote prospect.

What happened to the great soul of Adam when it failed in its task, opening a great chasm between Creation and Redemption? The answer to this is highly dramatic: the very highest soul roots, indeed, even the highest lights in many others stems, abandoned him and retreated to the upper world; only at the time of Redemption will they return to become reunited with their original organism, as the “sublime radiance” that will surround the restored divine image of man. Some of the “major roots” remained in Adam and rebuilt his soul substance after the fall, but his cosmic proportions had now shrunk to earthly dimensions. Most of his cosmic limbs dropped off, and their roots, together with the soul sparks contained therein, fell into the realm of the *kelippoth*, the impure and the corporeal—the realm of the demonic that had come into existence and attained its separate, external existence during the process of separation and excretion in the emanation of the five worlds. Just as the World of Action sank down, along with the other worlds of its rank, mixing with the *kelippoth*, the World of the “Outer Shells,” and thereby assumed material character, so did most of the souls, together with their sparks, become submerged in it. Thus, the stature of the “Adam of Holiness” became mixed with that of the “Ungodly Adam” (*Adam Belia’al*). These fallen sparks of soul roots now combined with the sparks of the light of the *Sefiroth*—as R. Hayyim Vital terms them, “the sparks of the *Shekhinah*”—which had sunk down following the Breaking of the Vessels and come under the sway of the *kelippoth*. They can be raised up again by Torah and *mitsvoth*: “Just as the *Shekhinah* was exiled within the *kelippoth* [because of Adam’s sin], so all the souls of the righteous are now exiled.”⁸³

Each of the second-degree, “minor soul roots” that existed within Adam (that is, each organ that was part of the union of his primal organs)

is viewed by Luria as “a great soul.” Each of these divides in turn into many individual sparks, constituting the souls of specific individuals in this world. Some parts can subdivide into a hundred such sparks, others into a thousand, depending upon the rank of the organ within the structure of the root to which it belongs, as well as the course of life taken by these sparks with their entry into the physical world. The merits and lapses of the soul—its *karma*, to use the language of Indian religion—can unite a larger number of sparks within it, or cause further fragmentation. The total number of holy sparks does not exceed six hundred thousand—the traditional figure for the number of Israelites present at the Revelation at Mount Sinai.⁵⁴

To summarize briefly, we find here four levels of souls: (1) the comprehensive soul of Adam himself; (2) the 613 “major roots,” corresponding to Adam’s organs; (3) the “minor,” second-degree roots contained in each of those “major roots,” each one of which individually constitutes a “great soul”; (4) the individual sparks, constituting the souls of individuals. Each individual spark is a complete soul in all its structures, and through the structure of its five soul degrees reaches up to that world from which it comes: there are souls that come from the lowest configurations of the World of *‘Assiyah*, and those that come from the highest configurations of the World of *‘Atsiluth*.

The division cited here is that which is most often repeated. These same works also contain other, slightly different hierarchies of the major and minor roots;⁵⁵ however, these are unimportant to the main concern of our study—the nature and destiny of the soul sparks. This concept, first mentioned en passant in the early Kabbalah, now moves to the center.

There are two concerns of decisive importance here. First of all, in every generation, from every great soul, including especially those that have sunk into the “shells,” a small number of sparks reascend from the *kelippoth*,⁵⁶ and are given a chance to cleanse themselves of the stain upon them and their light since Adam’s fall, thereby restoring their complete structure, which was damaged. Only the *nefesh*, which constitutes the basic individual element in man, “is that which initially enters into man at the time of his birth.”⁵⁷ If the soul proves meritorious, it can also draw

the higher levels of the soul down from their roots. But if it is not meritorious, but sullies itself with sin, and does not unite with its higher parts, then each of them—including *ruah* and *neshamah*—must seek its reintegration through transmigration.

Second, all the sparks and individual souls belonging to a given root—to use Solomon Alkabez's term, a "soul family"—are interconnected by a special affinity and sympathy. Only sparks from the same root can be united with one another by means of *gilgul* and *'ibbur*; only they are able to assist and strengthen one another. All of the sparks belonging to a great soul are controlled by the law of sympathy: they suffer with one another, and anything done by one of them, good or bad, affects all the others. Their destiny is determined by a deep, invisible connection of "soul affinity." Even the greatest *Tsaddik* can uplift from the shells only those sparks that are germane to him. Even under the best of circumstances, the *Tsaddik* can "bring out one or two sparks from the shells, lifting them up from there that they may enter into this world."⁸⁸ Admittedly, in accordance with the law of sympathy among the sparks, he can assist those sparks that are already in the process of transmigration by virtue of his own deeds. This is particularly so in the present period of the "Footsteps of the Messiah" (as Luria saw his own age), in which the very highest souls have returned to the world from their roots—whether through *gilgul* or *'ibbur*:

But now, in these latter generations, the *Shekhinah* has already descended to its feet, and also the souls that are in this generation are in the aspect of feet [of His *Shi'ur Komah*]. And because in the beginning all the souls were exiled there with the *Shekhinah*, therefore those primary supernal souls that already ascended and were then corrected, descend in order to guide and to leave even these lowest souls, so that they may achieve their *tikkun* (reintegration).⁸⁹

No soul root, even one of the very high rank, consists solely of soul sparks of the righteous; every soul family encompasses all sorts of different people. In addition to the 613 "major" sparks, all of which are the souls of scholars,

in every root there are many sparks, and all of them are unlearned, engaged in worldly activities. For every root of them is like a tree that brings forth fruits, which are the scholars, and leaves and branches and trunks and bark, which are the unlearned. And when the time comes for the sparks of these souls to go out in this world, one may find together two or three or ten sparks or the like; and all of them in one time and in one generation, even though they are all of one root.⁹⁰

In other words, a unique and hidden partnership is created among them. Strangely enough, according to Vital, the souls of parents and children rarely derive from the same soul root:

It is already well known that most children are not from one root. . . . Particularly among those who transmigrate, they have no relation to their fathers in most cases, and have no relation to the souls of their fathers or mothers whatsoever.⁹¹

Biological connections are understood here as quite separate from those determining the affinity and sympathy among souls.

But this is not the greatest enigma posed to us by Lurianic psychology. As has been stated above, following Adam's fall a few soul roots were left behind in the now diminished and shrunken Adam; these were tainted by the Fall, and required *tikkun* to restore their full structure in all 613 parts, although they never sank down into the realm of *kelippoth*. According to Luria, the sparks coming from these souls hold an extremely high rank

because they had the strength to survive within Adam, and did not fall into the *kelippoth*. And they have this merit in particular, that when Adam passed them on to Cain and Abel his sons, this was not considered a *gilgul* per se, as the other incarnations, in which the first body died and its soul is reincarnated in the second body, but they received their vitality during the lifetime of Adam, who bestowed it to his sons when they were born. Therefore, all the sparks included in Cain and Abel are considered as if they are still within Adam, and have not fallen away from him.⁹²

There derive from Adam, on the one hand, the souls of Cain and Abel, which he bequeathed to them while he was still alive and, on the other, the souls of the Patriarchs, which came to them by transmigration following Adam's death (although there are contradictory traditions concerning this matter).

This Gnostic element in the reevaluation of Cain's soul, which is now perceived as a "great soul," is one of the most remarkable and one of the strangest parts of Luria's doctrine, within a system that was strictly Jewish. It is also among the most interesting ideas in Lurianic thought, for which there is no precedent in earlier Kabbalah. This innovation demonstrates the possibilities for the development of Gnostic ideas within the context of strictly Jewish traditions. Chapter 21 of R. Hayyim Vital's *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (The Book of Transmigrations) is extremely revealing in this respect: the image of Cain is whitewashed there to the extent that he is now seen as a prophet.⁹³ The interpretation by the author (or of his teacher, Luria) of the passages about Cain and Abel in the *Tikkunei Zohar*, which emphasizes entirely different points and employs a completely new tone in reading, are indicative of a very strange process deserving of the closest attention. The transmigrations of the soul sparks originating in Cain and Abel play a central role in Lurianic discussions,⁹⁴ and we can clearly discern the fascination of these Kabbalists with the idea that many of the noblest souls participated in the first murder. The secret interconnections among the sparks whose root is in Cain's soul, among whom he includes many of the noblest and most important figures in Jewish history (including himself), are developed by Vital in great detail.⁹⁵ Cain's soul stems from the side of the judging powers (Adam's "left shoulder," *Din*), while Abel's came from his father's right shoulder (*Hesed*). In the present situation of the world, the powers of *Hesed*, the giving and outpouring of grace, enjoy a higher status than the receiving and constricting powers of *Din*; but some day, when all the souls shall be restored, "Cain will be infinitely higher than Abel."⁹⁶

Once a person has purified and restored all the sparks belonging to his soul on every level, reforming them from where they are mixed with the "Godless Adam" of the *kelippah*, and restoring the second-degree "minor roots" to their unity as a great soul, he has performed his mission. Vital

developed a precise casuistry of the circumstances and conditions under which the sparks, in their three primary soul degrees, enter a *gilgul* or an *'ibbur*. He meticulously defines what happens when the *nefesh* and *ruah* are separated in their *gilgulim*, or under what conditions it is possible to achieve in a single *gilgul* what would otherwise require an endlessly long chain of *gilgulim*. There are, of course, any number of contradictions and discrepancies here; for example, in one place Abraham's soul is described as ascending from the "shells," while elsewhere it is described as one of the souls that remained in Adam and did not fall. The notion that transmigration takes place through all the realms of nature—from inanimate matter, through vegetation, animal, and human life—also plays an important role in Luria: however, this is not seen as a process of development from below to above, but as an expiation for those soul sparks that missed their opportunities for *tikkun*. This concept introduces a complete mystical doctrine of nature.⁹⁷ But the texts also speak of an idea of gradual ascent:

Know that all nine hundred seventy-four generations that [God] thought to create and did not create because they were found wicked and sinful . . . fell into the depths of the *kelippah*, in the place of death where there is no vitality whatsoever. The Holy One, blessed be He, in His great mercy raises them up in every generation and every day, and little by little he plants them, in order to purge and purify and correct them, as they are very great and precious souls. . . . And the Holy One, blessed be He, gradually lifts them up, little by little, from level to level; first He places them in inanimate objects, and from inanimate objects to vegetation, and from vegetation to animals that do not speak, and from there to speaking beings—pagans and slaves—and from thence to Israelites.⁹⁸

Importance is also attached to another view: that since Adam's fall, the true root of man's soul (especially that of the *neshamah*) does not reside within the body, but hovers outside of it, in a kind of magnetic rapport with it. When the texts say that a certain person has deserved to

receive his *neshamah*, this is frequently understood in those terms. The soul sparks that undergo *gilgul* with a human being are likewise thought of as a kind of spiritual aura: "There are sparks that are very close to a person, and there are those that are remote from him; there are those that surround him from a distance, and those that surround him from nearby, hovering over the person."⁹⁹ Generally speaking, a person has no awareness of his earlier soul migrations; only those souls that enter into lower forms of life, especially animals, have a vague awareness, which heightens their torment at their bitter lot.¹⁰⁰

While some Kabbalists limit transmigration to the souls of Jews, many of them expressly acknowledge it is a universal law for all human beings. For non-Jews the seven Noahide commandments determine the soul's fate and its transmigrations no less than the specific commandments of the Torah do for Jews. The souls of the pious Gentiles "deserve to transmigrate . . . and will be forgiven, and thereafter will enter into Israel and be sanctified."¹⁰¹ Similarly, we read in the responsa of R. Joseph Alcastiel, written on the eve of the expulsion from Spain:

Those soul forms of the Godless Adam [i.e., of the Other Side] that were garbed in [pagan] bodies wither away, and those that are worthy undergo purification, taking upon themselves the seven Noahide commandments, which are branches of the Tree of Life, by which they live and enter under the wings of the *Shekhinah*; thereby they will not be antagonistic.¹⁰²

Many Kabbalists in the age of persecutions, particularly following the expulsion from Spain, adhered to the Jewish equivalent of the Christian doctrine of *Extra ecclesiam non est salus*—i.e., that there is no salvation outside of the Community of Israel. Since the rebellion against God with the building of the Tower of Babel,

the nations left the realm of the Almighty, and came under the control of the [heavenly] princes. . . . And their deeds and thoughts were not influenced by the action of the *Sefiroth*, because they do not hold thereto. . . . But because the holy souls are supernal ac-

tualities from the unity of the attributes, they are called children of the Omnipresent. For this reason, even though man is beloved because he is created in the [divine] image, the Noahides were excluded.¹⁰³

Thus, the nations of the world draw upon themselves soul forms from the Other Side, the demonic counterworld—an idea that often appears in connection with heinous misdeeds generally. These fill the sinning soul with impure powers, causing the light of holiness within the soul to fall into the captivity of the *Sitra Aħra* (Other Side), which is nourished by this light because it has no vital strength of its own. Cordovero even says that “the pagans, even [if they perform] all the sins in the world, do not damage the realm of holiness at all, because they do not have a soul from the side of holiness, but from the *kelippoth*.”¹⁰⁴ Luria and Vital concurred in this extreme view, but other Kabbalists demurred from it on a crucial point: a Noahide can also attain a divine soul, capable of reaching certain degrees of purification and illumination, by means of his good deeds: “There will shine upon them in their lifetimes an image from the holy place, to feed in the gardens.”¹⁰⁵

At the other extreme we find the demand that the soul of the Jew must transmigrate until it has not only fulfilled all the commandments, but has achieved illumination in all of the secrets of the Torah; in other words, only the Kabbalist and mystical illuminato has fulfilled the true human mission:

For the study of Torah is equivalent to all of them, and there are four [levels of] interpretation, whose acronym is *pardes* [i.e., *peshat*, *remez*, *derash*, *sod*: that is, the literal, allegorical, homiletical, and esoteric levels of interpretation), and he needs to make an effort and engage in them all. . . . And if he is missing one of them, according to his capability, he must transmigrate for this.¹⁰⁶

The doctrine of sympathy of souls somewhat mellowed such extreme demands: those sparks that come from the same soul root as the individual soul constitute a kind of expanded field of the psyche and assist it;

“all of them are responsible to one another, and all of them are one soul.”¹⁰⁷ I have already mentioned that these sparks are sometimes thought of as creating a kind of “supernal aura,” such that one might say this notion of sympathy of souls expresses a certain expansion of the psychophysical unity of the individual, through its transformation into a unified field of energy. The souls sparks are no longer limited within the framework of the visible, physical limits of the individual; rather, they influence his personality while moving within that field of energy. This idea opened the way for the complete reintegration (*tikkun*) of all organs and all levels of the individual personality. This goal could be accomplished by means of an especially illuminated soul spark, which might thereby reach down to the hidden corners, to all the soul sparks within its field of energy. Moreover, this becomes the point of departure for a further development of the doctrine of transmigration, which I should like to discuss by way of conclusion. In this view man’s entire environment is seen as a cosmic “energy field” for his soul; this is the culmination of the doctrine of *gilgul* in Hasidism.

Lurianic teaching, as codified in the writings of R. Hayyim Vital, exhibits contradictory tendencies on this point. We are told in several passages that “up to three reincarnated and old souls, together with one new soul, may be incarnated together in one individual body from the day of its birth, in such a way that they are together four souls,” while as many as four additional sparks may be added to these through means of *‘ibbur*.¹⁰⁸ In other passages, however, we hear that all the soul sparks of a person that have undergone transmigration are connected to him by means of a special sympathy: “For all the sparks of the soul, even those that have been corrected, go into full *gilgul* with the private, “uncorrected” spark from the day of his birth, and do not separate from him at all until the day of his death.”¹⁰⁹ While Vital was primarily interested in the former of these approaches, the Hasidic mystics concentrated upon the latter.

The two highest levels of the soul, *ḥayah* and *yehidah*, are discussed far less by Lurian psychology than are the three lower levels: *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah*. Whoever attains and restores the *yehidah* that belongs to his soul spark is freed of transmigration.¹¹⁰ Of course, the *yehidah* of *’Atsiluth*

is attainable only by the Messiah, whose soul, according to Vital, also fell into the exile of the *kelippoth* at the time of Adam's fall and came under its control. This doctrine, mentioned by Vital in passing and without any special emphasis,¹¹¹ was afterward taken up in the writings of Nathan of Gaza, the self-proclaimed prophet of the Kabbalistic Messiah Sabbatai Zevi, who made it into a central point in his far-reaching and momentous heretical doctrine; but this is not the place to discuss them.

We thus find in Lurianic Kabbalah a unique and peculiar elaboration and combination of ideas, some of which were based upon earlier Kabbalah, but were unified into a coherent system of thought only here, exhibiting their full power for the first time in this fusion. Lurianic Kabbalah placed the Jew in an ineluctable entanglement of transmigrations. These ideas linked an ancient teaching to the conviction of these generations that all things are in exile, that all things must wander and transmigrate in order to prepare, through a combined effort, for redemption. While the technical details of Lurianic theory were certainly abstruse and inaccessible to the masses, its symbolic character, taken as a key to the history of Israel, were highly influential among the people for many generations. This same Kabbalah had an additional effect: its doctrine of sympathy among soul sparks and the hidden magic operating between them lent a new and milder aspect to the severe law of moral causality, and placed the individual in a relation of profound interconnection and reciprocity with other souls.

V

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Lurianic doctrine of the soul sparks and their function in the inner course of world history moved in an entirely new direction when it was taken up by R. Israel Baal Shem Tov and his disciples, who created the Hasidic movement in Eastern Europe. It is highly revealing to see the profound transformation that took place in Kabbalistic concepts in this late stage of Jewish mysticism, without any special emphasis being placed on the changes themselves. To the contrary, the Hasidic authors presented the new form of this doctrine as

if it were nothing other than Luria's original teaching. The metamorphosis that took place in the doctrine of transmigration, like the reformulations of many other Kabbalistic notions by the great Hasidic masters, has deep historical roots; it may in fact be considered an excellent example of how closely mysticism is connected to history and how greatly mystical symbols are determined by historical experience.

In order to understand this change, we must once again return to the character of Lurianic Kabbalah. The key word of this school, as I have shown earlier, is *tikkun*—the restoration or reintegration of all things to their original condition, as intended in the divine plan of Creation; a plan that was never realized, because it was hindered by the Breaking of the Vessels, on an ontological level and by Adam's fall on a human plane. The completion of the process of *tikkun* is redemption; any act of *tikkun* is thus an act toward salvation. The subjugation of all religious acts and events, both visible and invisible, to the goal of *tikkun* charged Lurianic Kabbalah with an intense messianic tension. The great messianic outburst inspired by this doctrine, after it had struck roots in the heart of the Jewish community, brought in its wake a deep crisis in the spiritual world of the Kabbalah. The aftermath of this crisis, which found its keenest expression in the antinomian teachings of Sabbatianism, not only affected the emergence of Hasidism as a popular movement, but also the specific form in which the founders of Hasidism transformed the teachings of their Kabbalistic predecessors. This process is particularly marked by the neutralization of the acutely messianic element, whose dialectics had proven to be catastrophic.¹¹² The task was to defuse the messianic impetus in the doctrine of *tikkun* and deflect its potential danger. This goal was achieved in two ways. First of all, the concept of *tikkun* itself was largely pushed aside, and replaced at the center of Hasidic doctrine and life by the concept of *devekuth*, communion with God. Man's constant and intimate rapport with God is a value concerned with the personal sphere of religion, one that may be completely achieved by each individual. It is essentially a nonmessianic value, lacking in precisely those aspects that made the doctrine of the human role in the *tikkun* of the world so attractive, but also so seductive. The second way was to reinterpret the doctrine of *tikkun* in such a way as to weaken and dull its more universal and mes-

sianic aspects, and in its place to give crucial weight to the personal and individual character of man's actions toward elevating his individual soul sparks and restoring his original spiritual stature. The doctrine of *tikkun* was thereby connected with, at times even identified with, the doctrine of *devekuth*.

Man's *devekuth* with God (whose significance in Hasidism I have analyzed more precisely elsewhere)¹¹³ is a spiritual act performed through means of concentration and contemplation. All spheres of human life, even the most mundane, should be so thoroughly imbued with an awareness of God's presence, that even ordinary and social activities reveal an inward, contemplative aspect. This twofold meaning of human actions, as simultaneously visibly external and as carrying a contemplative aspect, added an additional tension to religious life. Of course, it was also likely to arouse a mental state that would resemble pure passivity to the outside observer. Indeed, even the earliest opponents of Hasidism already accused them of a passive, quietistic attitude toward life. In many cases the religious tension aroused by the demand for *devekuth* must have been resolved in passivity—which, to be sure, was a facile simplification and misinterpretation of this doctrine. But despite its basically contemplative character, the ideal of *devekuth* always had a strong element of spiritual activism for the Baal Shem and his disciples. It is not sufficient for a person to sit lost in contemplation, waiting for God's grace to manifest itself. Hasidism emphasizes the special character of the activity demanded of human beings. The active aspect of contemplative life finds its finest expression in the Hasidic teaching of the "raising of the holy sparks," which also sheds new light on the doctrine of the soul sparks for our present study. The term "raising of the sparks" originates in Lurianic Kabbalah, but no connection is drawn there between this notion and that of *devekuth*. In contrast to the Hasidic writings, in which the two ideas are often associated, in Lurianic writings they always appear separately, and the uplifting of sparks is invariably associated with the process of *tikkun*.

However, one must remember that Luria distinguished between two kinds of fallen sparks that need to be raised and redeemed from their captivity in order for the process of *tikkun* to be realized in all respects.

One kind are the sparks of divine light itself—the sparks of the *Sefiroth*, which, ever since the Breaking of the Vessels, have been scattered throughout Creation, even in the realm of the “shells.” These are the “sparks of the *Shekhinah*” of which Vital speaks. The other kind of sparks are those that come from Adam’s soul, as we have discussed above. Both kinds of sparks are imprisoned within the “shells” of the Other Side, and both must be released from there—each one in the way suitable to it. While it is not always easy in Vital’s writings to distinguish between them, in the final analysis the line of demarcation is generally clear enough. Only rarely is the law of the sympathy of souls—according to which a spark can only affect those sparks deriving from the same soul root—applied to the sparks of the *Shekhinah*, as such a division, by its very nature, does not take place. The observance of the *mitsvoth*, and particularly of meditation (*kavvanah*) in prayer, restores these sparks of the *Sefiroth* and returns them to their rightful place in the supernal worlds. It would seem that every person can lift up such sparks by means of appropriate meditations at the time of prayer, although now and again we hear that a person can only raise those sparks belonging to the world corresponding to the root of his soul.¹¹⁴ But while the soul sparks are connected to man’s soul and accompany him in his transmigrations, the sparks of the *Shekhinah* are absorbed and vanish within the hidden worlds of the divine lights to which they are raised.

This fundamental difference between two kinds of sparks—those of the soul and those of the *Shekhinah*—is already largely blurred in the popular literature of the later Kabbalah, in which the basic ideas of Lurianic doctrine were propagated to a wider audience; sometimes the psychological factor is stressed, and sometimes the purely mystical factor, without any reference to the wanderings of the soul. One might say that this blurring of distinctions augmented rather than decreased the enormous appeal of the Lurianic doctrine. Preachers, exegetes, and moralists took up this popular form of the Lurianic doctrine, which used a highly expressive symbolism to articulate the messianic mission of man in a disorderly world. Now what, we may ask, was the change introduced by Hasidism when it absorbed and adopted this doctrine? Is there any difference in its presentation by the followers of the Baal Shem Tov and that of

contemporaneous Kabbalistic moralists of a non-Hasidic tendency? Such a difference does indeed exist, although the Hasidic authors made a noticeable effort to obscure it. The momentous change lay in the strictly personal and intimate cast that the Baal Shem Tov gave to Lurianic doctrine. Let us look at a few classical formulations of this new view in Hasidic writings.

Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, a disciple of the Baal Shem, quotes his mentor with regard to the tripartite division of the soul into *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah*:

I heard from my master that the *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah* of a person transmigrate through the seven *Sefiroth* [i.e., through all the realms of existence in our world], and that the *nefesh* [is contained] in his servants and domestic animals. Thus, if he caused a flaw in his *nefesh*—that is, in the realm of activity—this will cause him trouble with his servants and domestic animals. *Ruah*, the “speaking spirit,” is the [power of] language, so that if he sinned against [the power of] speech through gossip and the like, this speech creates enemies who speak ill of him. . . . But the *neshamah* [the highest soul] dwells in the brain, from whence is made the seed of reproduction, which is his sons. Thus, if he defiled the thought that is in his brain, this will cause him trouble from his children. But by means of prayer with *kavvanah* (holy intentions) and good deeds, he may correct the three parts of his soul, and restore them to their root in the *Sefiroth*.¹¹⁵

In other words, the sparks of a person’s soul migrate within his immediate environment, where they anticipate that he will redeem them and restore them to their original place.

This idea appears in even more concrete form in other quotations from the Baal Shem Tov: God makes sure that every human being will meet the sparks belonging to the root of his own soul. There is a special sphere surrounding every person belonging to him alone, in a secret manner which cannot be attained by anyone else; this, as I have already stated, is a kind of cosmic energy field for his soul. R. Ephraim of Sudylkow, the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, writes:

I heard from my grandfather that everything belonging to a human being—his slaves and servants and domestic animals, and even the objects in his household—are all sparks of him, pertaining to the root of his soul, which he must lift up to their root. And this is: “declaring the end from the beginning” [Isa. 46:10]—i.e., “declaring” (*maggid*), a language of connection and drawing up; that is, that he connects the beginning—the Eternal and Beginning of All—to the end, that is, the highest of all levels. For even the lowest sparks are connected with their origin, up to the *’Ein-Sof*. But when a man, of whom they are his soul root, ascends upward, then they all ascend with him. And all this [takes place] when he truly cleaves to God. . . . And in this way he can lift them too. And this is what Moses alluded to when he said, “We will go with our young and with our old . . . with our flocks and with our herds” [Exod. 10:9]. For all of these are holy sparks that are imprisoned on the very lowest levels, and they must be raised up.¹¹⁶

An even more extreme formulation of this idea is brought by R. Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech, the successor to the Baal Shem Tov: “R. Israel Baal-Shem said that what a human being eats, and what he sits on, and what he uses are the sparks which are in those things. Therefore, a person should take care of his utensils and of all those things that belong to him, because of the sparks that are in this vessel, in order to pity the holy sparks.”¹¹⁷ The books of the Rabbi of Polonnoye are full of similar extreme formulations of this thesis. Surprisingly, he does not attribute them to the Baal Shem Tov, but to “the writings”—i.e., the Lurianic texts—most of which had not yet been printed at this time but were circulated in manuscript form. Thus, he says:

As is well known from the writings, all that a person eats, and his house and his business and his contemporaries and his wife—all these come to the person according to his nature, from his sparks. If a person earned it by his good deeds, then the sparks belonging to him by his nature come to him and unite with him, so that he may perform their *tikkun*.

We are told elsewhere that:

All a person's food, and his clothes and his dwelling and his business—all [come to him] that he may uplift his own sparks . . . as is known from the writings of Luria. . . . And this is the secret of "In all thy ways acknowledge Him" [Prov. 3:6]: to unite and to raise up the sparks of his own soul, which are the sparks of the *Shekhinah*.¹¹⁸

This reference to the Lurianic "writings" is all the more interesting, because the very element that is new in this teaching does not appear in those writings! To the best of my knowledge, no Kabbalist before the Baal Shem Tov ever said anything like this. What distinguishes these and many similar passages from the discussions of the doctrine of the sparks in pre-Hasidic Kabbalah and Musar is precisely the intimate and very personal character of man's relationship with his environment. Granted, works written in the immediate environment of the Baal Shem Tov—such as *Sefer Bet Perets*, *Neti'ah shel Simḥah*, *Lev Simḥah*, *Mishmereth ha-Kodesh*, and the like—offer us penetrating insight into the popular Kabbalah of the moralists of that period, who did try to emphasize the doctrine of sparks and to develop it, but it never appears there in the same form as found among the Hasidim. Even one generation after the Baal Shem, we find that the Kabbalist R. Eleazar Fishel of Strykow, to whom we owe the most detailed extant presentation of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the holy sparks,¹¹⁹ ignored such formulations and lines of thought. Yet, even though he himself was among the more outspoken *Mitnaggedim*, this author's ideas were in many respects close to those of Hasidism.

What the Hasidim may have regarded as a mere paraphrase of the authentic Lurianic doctrine in fact involved a crucial transformation of the understanding of this Kabbalistic doctrine. The sympathy between the person and the sparks of his soul is viewed in the Lurianic Kabbalah in an essentially abstract way. Here, too, we occasionally hear that particular soul sparks are "close" to his soul, but this closeness is never understood in the concrete sense of the actual surroundings of a particular person. The transfer of the soul's field of energy to the realm of concrete

social and material reality was the crucial Hasidic contribution to this doctrine. That which was the main interest of Luria and his disciples in the sixteenth century—namely, the transmigration of the soul sparks—is almost entirely missing among the Hasidim. The latter are not concerned with the casuistics and laws governing transmigration, but are far more interested in the new perspectives concerning the relation of man to his environment resulting from the shift of emphasis to “uplifting the sparks.” This is understandable enough: the identification of the sparks of the *Shekhinah* with those of the soul root—an identification that is nearly total in Hasidic literature—made the new focus easy for the Hasidim, as did the retreat from the messianic perspective of the doctrine of *tikkun* to that of *devekuth*, which is far more individualistic and far less dangerous.

Let us examine one example. R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye formulated the mystical meaning of the Exile as follows:

Therefore, one needed the exile of Israel among all the seventy nations, where the sparks fell, and each individual in Israel must be exiled there, in that place which contains sparks from the root of his soul, to separate and uplift them.¹²⁰

It would be difficult to find such statements in the ancient books, which explicitly view the significance of the Exile in terms of the need to liberate the sparks of the *Shekhinah* everywhere they were scattered after the Breaking of the Vessels. There is no mention made there of the sparks of the individual soul. According to the original Kabbalistic idea, every Jew (and not necessarily a particular individual Jew), by performing a commandment somewhere in the Exile, can raise the sparks of the *Shekhinah* from that place. One might say that the Hasidim shifted the emphasis from the metaphysical to the individual sphere—no small metamorphosis. Likewise, the interpretation of eating as a sacred act—a point of significant concern in both systems—while seemingly similar, is actually profoundly different in the two systems. Even such an important Kabbalist as R. Sabbatai of Raszkow, one of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, did not dare mention this individual element in his edition of the Lurianic

prayer book, even though he treats there in detail the Kabbalistic “mystery of eating.” He was evidently unable to find any suitable authority for his master’s interpretation in the canonical texts of the Lurianic Kabbalah.¹²¹ We can see how difficult this was from another quotation, offered by way of conclusion. R. Benjamin of Salositz, a disciple of the Rabbi of Polonnoye, writes:

I heard in the name of an important man the thesis that all of a person’s movable property—whether inheritance, jewelry, gold and silver, animals and fowl—all contain holy sparks, [coming] from the vitality belonging to their owner’s soul. And I have found support for this thesis in *Likkutei Torah* [a Lurianic collection on the Torah] on the verse “and Jacob was left alone” [Gen. 32:25]—that he returned for small vessels.¹²²

However, the quotation cited here in support of this thesis is strictly consistent with the Lurianic principle as we have seen it above, and nowhere makes mention of the unique shift attributed to it.¹²³

Despite the difference between these doctrines, R. Benjamin seeks “support” for this thesis, just as his teacher sought a source for it in the Lurianic writings. Incidentally, the lack of clarity in indicating sources in the Hasidic literature contributed a good deal to obscuring the problem discussed here—a point which, so far as I have seen, was never clearly recognized. It also should be noted that the Hebrew term *hayyuth*, used by R. Benjamin and all of the early Hasidic writers to indicate the realm of life belonging to the sparks of a person’s soul, corresponds precisely to what I have described above as the soul’s field of energy.

Thus, a person stands in a relation of sympathetic rapport with his immediate environment, which imposes upon him a mission that he and no one else can perform, in accordance with the law of sympathy among soul sparks. This is not the place to demonstrate the dangerous dialectic element inherent in the notion of a person’s environment as a cosmic field of energy, because the raising of the sparks from within the *kelippoth* involves not only a transforming and redeeming act but also certain possible destructive effects. I must forgo analyzing this important point,

which has virtually disappeared from modern presentations and interpretations of Hasidic teachings.¹²⁴ The questions that arise here go beyond the doctrine of transmigration and sympathy of souls, which is the subject of our discussion here.

In Hasidism, this doctrine largely lost the messianic character which is possessed in Lurianic teaching. It was linked to a contemplative virtue of *devekuth*, and thus ceased to be universal. According to several statements of the Baal Shem, only one who is in a state of *devekuth* is capable of locating and redeeming the sparks of his soul from his environment; this doctrine could easily be altered into one of a privilege of specially chosen souls. As for one who is not in a state of *devekuth*,

a man who walks irregularly with God, may He be blessed, then He (i.e., God) walks with him irregularly, and does not prepare for him clothing and food that contain sparks of his own soul root, so that he may perform their *tikkun*.¹²⁵

Of course, raising of the sparks was not always dependent upon special qualifications. Everyday objects change owners, because each of these must uplift certain sparks from them. Once a person has finished this task, he has no further claim to the object “and then God, may He be blessed, takes that object from him and gives it to another, to whom the sparks remaining within that object pertain.” The sources make it clear that this does not only apply to *Tsaddikim* who are in a state of *devekuth*. Indeed, this duality extends through all areas of Hasidic doctrine: that which is said in one place about human beings in general is restricted elsewhere to the true *Hasid* or to the *Tsaddik*. The original impulse of the Kabbalist doctrine was certainly meant to extend as far as possible the realm of applicability of the doctrine of sparks that transmigrate and seek their roots, thereby creating a general relationship of sympathy among the souls. It was only the mass application of this doctrine, which so easily lent it more robust, popular forms, that forced the leadership of the Hasidic movement to reduce its area of validity—a limitation that often seemed to be a renunciation of the principle itself.

Tselem:
THE CONCEPT
OF THE
ASTRAL BODY

I

One of the Kabbalistic ideas that poses particular difficulties for scholarly analysis is the doctrine of the *tselem*, a term first used by the *Zohar* to refer to the unique, individual spiritual shape of each human being. In the first chapter of this book I have spoken about the significance of the term *tselem* in the Bible, where it is used in the context of the creation of man in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). This verse, which became quite problematical for monotheistic theology, served the Kabbalists as a catchword for a notion bearing only a loose connection to the biblical idea. The Kabbalists confronted a profound problem: what in fact constituted the special, individual essence of each human being? This problem arises in particular in connection with the theory of transmigration (which they fully accepted), which seemed to throw into question the unique and irretrievable nature of human existence. What then is the *principium individuationis* of a person, that element that constitutes his unique existence

and sustains his identity throughout its various transmigrations? In the absence of such a principle of individuality, protests were voiced against the whole theory of transmigration even by groups leaning toward the Kabbalah. Isaac ibn Latif, a mystic who stood midway between the philosophy of his day and the already crystallizing Kabbalah, wrote around 1250, prior to the publication of the *Zohar*, in vehement opposition to the idea of transmigration. In a collection of mystical aphorisms and paradoxes, he describes transmigration as a heretical doctrine;¹ his main argument is that transmigration contradicts the necessary principle of the individuality of every single existence. Clearly, ibn Latif did not know of a teaching, already widespread in Kabbalistic circles, that affirms the existence within every human being of a unique element belonging to each individual as a permanent specific *Gestalt* factor throughout its life.

What is the nature of this element, which apparently does not participate in the soul's wanderings, and is referred to in the *Zohar* and other writings as man's *tselem*? Is this a Kabbalistic version of the doctrine of the "self" as the deepest spiritual essence within man, or is it a version of the idea of an astral body or "psychic body" within man, which constitutes a third, independent entity mediating between body and soul? One can of course maintain that these are not mutually exclusive notions, that man's occult "self" is manifest in this "psychic body." It is obvious that the *tselem*, as the pure shape of the specific individual, was subject to various interpretations. Nevertheless, analysis of the Kabbalistic sources cited below supports the assumption that we are dealing, albeit in different variations, with the notion of the astral body as the fixed and determinative element of man's being.

As our point of departure, we can use a Kabbalistic text that speaks of an undefined "essence" (*etsem*) of man that may also manifest itself and confront him. The image that appears in this text bears no direct link to the particulars of Kabbalistic psychology as it developed among the Spanish Kabbalists and in the *Zohar* in the wake of Neoplatonic psychology. In the collection *Shushan Sodoth*, edited by Moses ben Jacob of Kiev—a work that has been largely ignored by scholars, even though it is extant in print—we find some extremely interesting discussions of the occult character of prophecy as an encounter of man with his self. Nowhere else

in Kabbalistic literature have I found anything similar. While this work was itself compiled in 1509, the passage relevant to our discussion dates to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The collection is composed of various excerpts from various works written during those centuries, at least one of which was written by a disciple of R. Abraham Abulafia, the leading representative of the ecstatic school of “prophetic Kabbalah.”² The strongly personal tinge of these accounts, which is particularly striking here, is rare in Kabbalistic literature, which does not generally care for such confessions. The following translation is based on the Oxford manuscript of the text of *Shushan Sodot*,³ which is more accurate than the printed version:

A great secret [concerning the Midrashic statement⁴: “Great is the power of the prophets, who make the form to resemble its Former.” We have already explained what seems to us to be the meaning of this secret,⁵ but then I found a passage from one of the earlier authors on this subject, and my heart urges me to record it, for it offers an explanation of the foregoing. The following is the text of that account.

The deeply learned Rabbi Nathan, of blessed memory, said to me: Know that the complete secret of prophecy to a prophet consists in that he suddenly sees the form of his self standing before him, and he forgets his own self and ignores it . . . and that form speaks with him and tells him the future. And concerning this our sages said, “Great is the power of the prophets, who make the form [appearing to them] to resemble its Former.” And the learned sage R. Abraham ibn Ezra, of blessed memory, said: “The one who hears [at the time of prophecy] is a human being, and the one who speaks is a human being.”⁶ And another learned man wrote the following: “It occurred to me, by the power of combination [of letters of the holy names of God] and by solitary meditation, that I encountered that light which accompanied me, as I have discussed in the book *Sha ‘arei Tsedek*.⁷ But to see my own form standing before me—this I was not granted and this I cannot bring about.” Yet another learned man writes the following: “And I, the young one, know and acknowledge with full certainty that I am not a prophet nor the

son of a prophet, and I have not the holy spirit and I do not make use of the heavenly voice;⁸ these things have not been vouchsafed to me, and I have not taken off my garment or washed my feet.⁹ Nevertheless, I call heaven and earth to witness—as the heavens are my witness and my Guarantor is on high!—that one day I was sitting and writing down a Kabbalistic secret, when suddenly I saw the form of my self standing before me, and my own self disappeared from me, and I was forced and compelled to cease writing.” Likewise, while we were composing this book,¹⁰ and adding the vowel marks to the Ineffable Name of God, strange objects appeared before our eyes, like the image of red fire at sunset, until we were confused and stopped. And this happened to us several times while we were writing.¹¹

We cannot but feel the intense excitement in the accounts of these three authors, two of whom saw the image of their own “self,” while the third, to whom this was not vouchsafed, likewise regards the vision of the self as the supreme level of mystical experience (we know of the mystical experiences of this author from his work *Sha‘arei Tsedek*). This is the experience of the prophets, whose own pure “self” conveys to them the prophetic tiding. What they encountered was not essentially different from themselves; what was sent to them was not a divine apparition or an angel, but their own pure form. That which is described here as “the form of his self” is undefined in terms of the traditional division of levels of the soul. Indeed, there seems good reason to argue that this self is an angelic “I” connected with man’s essential nature, a kind of personal angel intrinsically belonging to man, which here becomes visible to him. On the other hand, the emphasis on the element of self-effacement and self-forgetting during this experience indicates that these Kabbalists sought within this “self-image” something springing from the depths of man’s own nature and concealed within his personality. The latter meaning is more in line with the concept of the “self” as an independent spiritual or astral body, whereas the former approach suggests another direction. But it is doubtful whether the difference between the two approaches is as great as might seem at first glance. According to the

accounts of those who have had such experiences, and the statements of many scholars in this field, the individual who sees an image of himself perceives an emanation of his own being made independent, which might very well be understood as his "astral body."

In Kabbalistic literature this notion is closely associated with other themes, preserved in parallel contexts in the religions of late antiquity and in Neoplatonism. Particularly striking is the similarity between the above descriptions and the theories about man's "perfected nature" and its manifestation as his "personal daemon" (i.e., attendant spirit) or angel. Such theories from the early medieval esoteric tradition are preserved in several Arabic texts. We must note, above all, the book *Ghayat al-hakim* (The Aim of the Wise), a work also extant in a Latin version entitled *Picatrix*. The editor of the Arabic text describes it as an "Arabic manual of Hellenistic magic."¹² This compilation includes various fragments from the pseudepigraphic hermetic literature, some of which has survived in manuscript only, which contains several pieces concerning the magical evocation of the spiritual being or "perfected nature" of the person himself. This entity is a metamorphosis of the "personal daemon," which first clearly appears in the Greek magical papyri; the Neoplatonist Iamblichus subsequently developed an entire doctrine and system of theurgic practice around this entity.¹³ Although there is no Greek equivalent of the term "the perfected nature" (*ha-teva' ha-mushlam*), the transition to the use of this terminology is clear when we read in the papyri that the magician addresses his daemon as "fathomless father of nature."

When a human being succeeds in making contact with his "perfected nature," it reveals to him all hidden secrets and becomes a spiritual guide to the initiate, "opening the bolts of wisdom and conveying to him the keys to the gates, in dreams and in a waking state." Hermes reports:

When I wished to find knowledge of the secrets of Creation, I came upon a dark vault within the depths of the earth, filled with blowing winds. . . . Then there appeared to me in my sleep a shape of most wondrous beauty [giving me instructions how to conduct myself in order to attain knowledge of the highest things]. I then said to him: "Who are you?" And he answered: "I am your perfected nature."

This entity is divided into four *pneumata*, or spiritual beings, whose four magical names constitute, according to the magicians, the mystery of mysteries. Such a revelation was supposedly granted to pre-Adamite sage, who “knew how to see with spiritual eyes and to discern with a spiritual heart.” Socrates is credited with designating the perfected nature as “the sun of the philosopher, his root and his branch.” Hermes called it “the pneuma of the philosopher, connected with his star and guiding him . . . and for the philosopher it fulfills the function of his guide, teaching the initiate word by word and opening gate after gate.” It is likewise connected with the biological and psychophysical existence of man’s nature, as follows from this description: “It grows with him and nourishes him.” We are likewise told of “the rays of light of the perfect nature preserved in his soul.”

We are indebted to Henry Corbin for his valuable studies of interpretations of the “perfected nature” in such major twelfth-century philosophers as Abul Barakat (a Baghdad Jew who in his later years converted to Islam) and such esoterics as Suhrawardi of Aleppo. The perfected nature is both the divine intellect in man, and the angel who protects and guides him.¹⁴ According to Helmut Ritter, this personal daemon, seen through the eyes of a medieval Christian cleric, “suddenly acquires familiar features, and we recognize him as Dr. Faust’s Devil, who made a pact with him and thereafter initiates him into the secrets of black art.”¹⁵ Indeed, we shall see below in the *Zohar* that such transformations are not all that farfetched, at least in Jewish texts. One of the texts of Hellenistic magic, the so-called “Mithras Liturgy,” contains a passage that speaks of man’s “perfected body” in a context in which the concept of “perfected nature” would fit nicely; this passage may very well refer to an ethereal or astral body, not unrelated to the “perfected nature.”¹⁶ Reitzenstein already saw a certain kinship between these concepts and certain Iranian and Gnostic images of a primal celestial image or *Doppelgänger* of man; this is also his celestial garment, kept in the heavens where it grows with his good deeds in the world, which comes out to meet him and envelop him once the soul returns to the upper world. All this is described in the famous Gnostic hymn known as “The Song of the Pearl” or “The Song of the Soul.”

Is it proper to discern Iranian eschatological motifs in the conceptual world under discussion here, which is seemingly so very different? In my opinion, study of the Kabbalistic material indicates that this is indeed the case: all of these images survive quite clearly in Kabbalistic literature, where they are connected with the concept of the *tselem*. In the history of the development of these Kabbalistic images, we find two parallel directions: an Oriental-Gnostic line and a Neoplatonic philosophical one. The latter stems from the reinterpretation of Platonic and Aristotelian psychology, connecting them with one another, which initially led to a clear formulation of the concept of the astral body or the spiritual body.¹⁷ Yet strangely enough it is interesting to note that in all of the rich magical papyri material there are very few Greek instructions as to how to attain the vision of the “self,” about which we would expect to find more information. Nevertheless, one prescription for achieving this “self-vision” has come down to us, albeit unrelated to the act of conjuring up the personal daemon, even though such a link is self-evident.¹⁸ Socrates’ advice, “Know thyself!” here becomes “See thyself!” This is especially clear in the discussions of Iamblichus, who reveals a passionate interest in the evocation of the personal daemon. Beginning with him, it is repeatedly asked whether this personal daemon is part of the soul itself, or belongs to a higher and more perfect class of supernal beings. The masters of esoteric theosophic psychology constantly engaged in this question, albeit without ever reaching any cogent conclusion. In a later development Porphyry’s descriptions were reworked to allow room for this notion of “self-vision.” I refer to Plotinus’ description of his experience of intellectual ecstasy and his “entrance into his own self” (*Enneads*, IV, 8, §1), a phenomenon actually quite different from the ideas treated here. This is exemplified by the paraphrase of this passage found at the beginning of the so-called “Theology of Aristotle,” a Neoplatonic text from the early Middle Ages that was considered a *locus classicus* by numerous medieval authors. To quote the words of “Aristotle” as cited by R. Shem Tov ibn Falaquera:

At times I in a manner of speaking isolate myself in myself and remove my body, and it is as if I were a simple entity without a

body. And I see myself in the beauty and glory that remains, and I am amazed and stunned. . . . And I see myself as if I stand within the world of the divine intellect.¹⁹

The concept of the “perfected nature,” albeit deriving from pseudo-hermetic circles, was interpreted by a philosopher such as Abul Barakat in a rational manner, parallel to Avicenna’s doctrine of prophecy. Similarly, we find in Judaism rationalistic reinterpretations of the above-discussed doctrine of prophecy as the vision of the “form of the self.” In the sixteenth century, the midrashic statement about the prophet’s ability to imagine God in human shape—“to make the form to resemble its Former”—was reinterpreted by the major Talmudist and philosopher R. Moses Isserles of Cracow. Working in a strictly rationalistic manner, yet parallel to the images we have already seen, R. Isserles seems to have been inspired, paradoxically, by the mystics. Thus, he explicitly cites R. Judah Hayyat (ca. 1500), who compares the human shape seen by the prophet in a vision (e.g., as in Ezek. 1:26) to the image which man sees of himself.

Isserles’s point of departure is the talmudic statement concerning the difference between Moses and all the other prophets: “All of the prophets gazed into a dark mirror, but Moses our teacher gazed into a clear glass” (*Yevamoth* 49b). Isserles comments:

For in truth, it is fitting to describe Him by this parable and metaphor, for light is found with Him [Dan. 2:22], and in Him all those who gaze see, and each one sees in Him like one gazing in a mirror. For the coarse matter that is in man stands opposite the prophet or the one who contemplates, behind the clear light that is in the soul, which is like a mirror for him, and he sees in it, in an inner vision, his own form. For this reason the prophets compared the divine glory (*Kavod*) to a human image, for they saw their own form. But Moses our teacher, because he had removed from himself all corporeality, and there was none of the dark matter from without left within him, saw naught but the brilliant light itself, and there was no [reflected] image, but he saw only the clear aspect. . . .

And let not this reason be a small thing in your eyes, for it strikes me as being the truth concerning the prophetic visions: that they saw the *Kavod* (the divine glory) in human shape, which was the shape of the prophet himself. And for this reason our rabbis said: "Great is the power of the prophets, who made the form to resemble the Former." That is to say, they transferred their own form that they saw to the Creator. And this is the literal meaning of this saying, according to this way [of interpretation]. Similarly, the [author of] *Minḥath Yehudah* wrote, in his Commentary to *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohuth*, as follows: "The lower Adam is a throne for the upper Adam; for the physical limbs in him allude to the spiritual limbs up above, and they are divine potencies. And not for naught did He say, 'Let us make man in our image' [Gen. 1:26]. But this image is the image of the supernal, spiritual man, and the prophet is the physical man, who at the moment of prophecy becomes spiritual, and whose external senses nearly depart from him; therefore, if he sees the image of a man, it is as if he sees his own image in a glass mirror."²⁰

It is precisely the gross, material nature of the prophet that causes his vision to become a contemplation of himself—unlike the case of Moses, whose nature was so purified that it no longer obstructed the passage of light, enabling him to receive a direct vision of the divine light without any form. We again find here a rationalistic reinterpretation of what was originally an occult experience.

Insofar as I can tell, the Kabbalists themselves never went that far.²¹ They generally saw prophecy as a metamorphosis of the form of the prophet into the image of his own angel, who appears to him. Thus, in the words of R. Isaac ha-Cohen of Soria (ca. 1270), we read:

In the prophet and seer, all kinds of [physical and spiritual] potencies become weakened and change from form to form, until he enwraps himself in the potency of the form that appears to him, and then his potency is changed into the form of an angel. And this form, which is changed within him, gives him the power to absorb the prophetic potency [which is an influx from above], and [this

angelic form] is engraved in his heart in a spiritual, visual way. And when the angel has completed his mission, the prophet becomes stripped of the power of the form that has appeared to him and takes on the power of his original form; he removes one form and puts on another form. Then all his parts reconnect with one another, and all his physical powers return as they were at the beginning, and then he speaks and prophesies in the form of human beings [that is, in his regular human form].²²

Thus, the prophet needs to utterly purify his spiritual nature, virtually draining himself of himself so that the angel may garb itself in his power; only after this transformation takes place can the prophet receive his mission from the angel, who in a certain sense he himself has become. During this state, in which the prophetic influx flows into the prophet, he cannot yet render the prophetic message in human speech. This is only possible at the end of his ecstatic metamorphosis, when the prophet has returned to his own human form and can impart his vision in speech. This idea of prophecy does not seem to be that far removed from the perception of “perfected nature” as an angel appearing to man (here, too, it seems that the “perfect man” is the prophet), revealing to him secrets of the world of the intellect and other secrets, as discussed in Abul Barakat. In both cases the original conception of the angel as an individual’s “personal daemon” is obscured, although it remains in the background as an esoteric notion, and is only hinted at. Emptying the prophet of his everyday self permits him to absorb his angelic self.

II

We have thus far discussed an unusual experience, granted only to chosen individuals. However, if we discuss the development of the concept of *tselem* among the Kabbalists, we find that it constitutes a basic element in their theory of man in general. Already among the twelfth-century Ashkenazic Hasidim, the ancient motifs of man’s personal angel or daemon were linked to the image in which man was created. R. Eleazar of Worms,

who must have been acquainted with occult, hermetic sources unknown to us, begins with an image that occurs in ancient *Merkavah* mysticism:

Each person has his form above, who is his advocate . . . an angel who guides that person's "star." And when he is sent below, he has the image of that person who is beneath him. . . . And this is, "and God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him" [Gen. 1:27]. Why twice, "in His image / in the image of"? One is the image of man, and one is the image of the angelic being, who is in the form of that man.²³

This angel is now understood as the person's double, about which nothing is said in the older Jewish sources of *Merkavah* mysticism. The sending of this angel to the earthly world even involves manifestations of this *Doppelgänger* to the person, a phenomenon used by R. Eleazar to explain various talmudic legends. On the other hand, he does not explicitly connect this with the prophetic mission; he instead identifies this archetypal form with the divine image (*tselem* 'Elohim) in which the human being is created. The *tselem* 'Elohim is the image of his angel that is imprinted upon him at the moment of birth, or even earlier, at conception. Unlike Iamblichus, who affirmed the possibility of evoking one's angel by means of incantations and the like, R. Eleazar denies such a possibility. On the other hand, traditions concerning such techniques did exist among other groups of Jewish esoterics.²⁴

The *Zohar*'s discussions about the *tselem* must be understood against this background, although they of course presuppose a far more highly developed form of Kabbalistic psychology. Here the concept of a purely personal angel is replaced by that of a preexistent, primordial shape (*diyokna*) and above all by that of a preexistent heavenly garment worn by the soul in its paradisiacal existence prior to entering the body. Pure souls also require clothing, even in their celestial state; only under highly extraordinary circumstances do they strip off this raiment (thought of as ethereal by *Zohar*) and appear uncovered before God. The *Zohar* speculates at length about these garments, going back to the approach of earlier sources of the Spanish Kabbalah, as I shall show, which it then

developed according to its own lights. The *Zohar* regarded this ethereal garb as a kind of spiritual body, thereby adopting and making its own (albeit on a different psychological basis) the Neoplatonic notion of the astral body. The strictly Neoplatonic form of this conception was known in Jewish literature; it can be found, for instance, in a treatise on the essence of the soul written in Arabic during the eleventh century by a Jewish Neoplatonist in Andalusia (and mistakenly attributed to R. Bahya ibn Paquda). He writes:

The body is divided into two parts—the body that is visible to the senses, which is completely revealed, so that it is superfluous to give any proof thereof; and another body concealed from the senses, which is called “the bodily essence.”²⁵

In addition to the coarse material body which is perceived by the senses, there exists a subtle body beyond physical perception; in keeping with Platonic and Neoplatonic psychology, it acquires qualities commensurate with the specific character of the celestial spheres through which it passes. This astral body, as it is rightfully called here, constitutes a stage in between the physical body and the soul, which are so different that they cannot connect or act upon one another without an intermediary. While the Kabbalists probably took the idea of the astral body’s mediating function from the philosophical tradition, they described it in terms of the “garments of life” woven in Paradise from celestial light or ether, a characterization that goes back to an Iranian tradition concerning this idea, already Judaized in the Book of Enoch and the *Merkavah* literature.²⁶

The ethereal body, which belongs to every human earthly body, is now designated by the *Zohar* as *tselem*. At the same time, it is also a biological principle operating within the human organism and changing its shape along with it. It is formed and impressed within the soul at the moment of conception, “and when he goes out into the world—he grows with the same *tselem*, he walks with the same *tselem*” (*Zohar*, III, 13b); it only leaves him immediately before his death (*Zohar*, I, 217b; III, 13b). Only once (III, 104a) does the *Zohar* explicitly state that this is identical with the *tselem* of Genesis in which man was created, but there is no doubt

that this is the intention of other passages as well. In the *Zohar*, exactly as in the famous passage in Dante's *Purgatorio* (canto 25), the astral body is linked to man's shadow, a connection facilitated by the obvious wordplay in Hebrew on *tselem* and *tsel* (shadow). The shadow is interpreted by the *Zohar* as none other than an external projection of the inner *tselem*; this approach opens the gate for various magical and folkloristic notions concerning the shadow, which we need not discuss here.

We read in the *Zohar* the following about the *tselem* and its creation:

When a man begins to consecrate himself before intercourse with his wife with a sacred intention, a holy spirit is aroused above him, composed of both male and female. And the Holy One, blessed be He, directs an emissary who is in charge of human embryos, and assigns to him this particular spirit, and indicates to him the place to which it should be entrusted. This is the meaning of "The night said, a man-child has been conceived" (Job 3:3). "The night said" to this particular emissary, "a man-child has been conceived" by so-and-so. And the Holy One, blessed be He, then gives this spirit all the commands that He wishes to give, and they have already explained this.²⁷ Then the spirit descends together with the image [*tselem*—J.C.], the one in whose likeness [*diyokna*—J.C.] [the spirit] existed above. With this image [man] grows; with this image he moves through the world. This is the meaning of "Surely man walks with an image" (Ps. 39:7). While this image is with him, man survives in the world. . . .

Come and see. When the soul descends in order to enter this world, it comes down into the earthly Garden of Eden and sees the glory of the spirits of the righteous, standing row upon row. After this, it goes to Gehinnom and sees the wicked crying "Woe! Woe!", with none to take pity on them, and all this serves as a warning to it, and the holy image stands over it until it goes out into the world. When it goes out into the world the image is summoned for it and it accompanies it and grows with it, as it is said "Surely man walks with an image" [ibid.—J.C.]. A man's days exist through the image, and are dependent on it. This is the meaning of "For we are but of

yesterday and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow" (Job 8:9)—"our days" are literally "a shadow."²⁸

In other words, the shadow (*tsel*), which is an omen for the length of a man's life, is none other than an external manifestation of the *tselem*.

Here the two motifs are clearly linked: on the one hand, the *tselem* as a principle determined before birth; on the other hand, as the biological principle of the individual life, containing and determining the growth of the organism and its life span. Oddly enough, the *tselem* is not described here as a garment of the soul, but as something that "stands" or "floats" over it; in other passages (in which, to be sure, the term *tselem* does not expressly appear), such a function is ascribed to the garment of the soul. Just as a man's days are here marked out on the *tselem*, another passage speaks about the garment made "from the days" worn by the soul, which it weaves for itself from the *mitsvoth* and pious deeds performed in life. This garment also becomes the soul's heavenly attire when it returns to Paradise after death.²⁹ The author of the *Zohar* evidently knew and combined two different traditions: According to one, the garment of the soul is preexistent and contains the soul's earthly days; it passes as an astral body into the semen and the developing embryo. According to the other tradition, the garment is woven out of a man's good deeds and accompanies him into the upper world. The same passage in the *Zohar* comments on the verse "And Abraham was old, and had come along in days" [Gen. 24:1]:

"Come along in days"—because he merited [by his good deeds], when he left this world, those days, with which he literally went in and garbed himself. And nothing was taken away from this precious clothing.

The latter image clearly parallels the Iranian notion of the *Daena* which, according to Zoroastrian eschatology, is the image that accompanies the deceased [as his higher self], but is also conceived as coming into existence from a man's good works, which correspond to his true "self."³⁰ The author of the *Zohar* did not use Persian sources directly; rather, this

notion first migrated into Islamic eschatology, where it can be documented in several traditions cited by al-Buchari,³¹ who died in 870, and from thence it spread to Jewish groups. R. Jacob ben Nissim of Kairouan (d. 1062) edited a collection of stories in Arabic about the deeds of the pious, translated into Hebrew under the title *Hibbur Yafeh me-ha-Yeshu'ah* (A Pleasant Collection Concerning Salvation). One of these remarkable tales concerns a pious man "whose garment was not complete," and who completes it with an extravagant act of piety: his wife tells him to sell her in the market and to give the money received for her to the poor. In the end, a heavenly voice proclaims: "Your garment is completed; but know that the garment of your wife is better than your own."³² It can be demonstrated that R. Moses de Leon, author of the *Zohar*, knew the Hebrew translation of this collection and used it as a source. The author's eschatological imagination in this earlier work wavers among various images: he sometimes separates them and sometimes fuses them together. Alongside the charming and attractive notion (frequently repeated) of a garment woven out of a man's good deeds, we find the notion of a preexistent paradisiacal garment in which the soul is also clothed after death (e.g., in *Zohar*, II, 150a). Both ideas are combined by the author in the image of the *tselem*. The *tselem* is the "garment of days" and the life principle, but it is also the garment that comes from the upper world, joining the soul in the coarse-material body and leaving it at the time of death, i.e., returning to its place in the upper world. Thus, the *tselem* is a joining of man's "essence" or "self" with his astral body.

In another passage, we read:

We found in the [legendary] *Book of King Solomon* that, at the moment of intercourse below, the Holy One, blessed be He, sends a likeness that has the physiognomy of the person [about to be formed] imprinted and etched upon this image, and it stands over that [act of] intercourse. And were the eye allowed to see [that is, were man's spiritual perception more refined], he would observe above his head an image formed like the physiognomy of [that] person, and in that same image man is created. But so long as this image that his Master has sent does not hover over his head and is

not present, no human being can be created [from this intercourse]. . . . At the moment when the spirits [meant to enter human beings] leave their place, each one dresses itself before the Holy King in splendid shapes, corresponding to the physiognomy with which it will exist in this world, and from that same primal image emerges the *tselem*. And the *tselem* is the third entity following the spirit, and it enters this world at the time of intercourse. And there is no intercourse in the world without the *tselem* standing between them [i.e., the married couple]. (*Zohar*, III, 104b)

The designation of the *tselem* as a third element, after the spirit, can be easily explained in terms of the *Zohar*'s psychology: the *tselem* is the mediating element between the life soul, *nefesh*, which is the lowest sphere of the human psyche, and the body itself. It follows from this that the *Zohar* regards the *tselem* as the astral body. Israel receives this *tselem* from the holy realms, but the pagan nations receive it from unclean and demonic realms, we are then told. The notion of the *tselem* as the physiognomy of a person is already familiar to us from R. Eleazar of Worms. Thus, were the *tselem* to emerge and become visible to the person, he would experience a kind of *Doppelgänger* phenomenon in which he encounters himself in an occult manner. The notion of the *tselem* connects with the idea with which we opened our discussion, in which a person encounters the "shape of himself." Indeed, in R. Moses Cordovero's great Kabbalistic opus (1548) dealing with the doctrine of the *tselem* as the astral body, we find the observation that "some of the pious achieve the observation of their image even in this world."³³

The occult experience of the *tselem* as the astral body of the righteous is also mentioned by R. Hayyim Vital, R. Isaac Luria's chief disciple: "The ethereal body of them [the righteous] is [contained] in the secret of the *tselem*, which is perceived by those who have purified vision."³⁴ Vital also advocates the remarkable theory that without the intermediacy of the astral body the soul would consume the body: "God, may He be blessed, in introducing the soul into the body so that it not consume it, prepares for it a garment as an intermediary between the soul and the body."³⁵

Two other factors ought to be mentioned in connection with this Zoharic doctrine. First of all, the *Zohar* claims elsewhere (III, 43a) that the *tselem* divides into two related components: “And the two of them are tied together, as Solomon said, “until the day wanes and the shadows flee away” [Song of Songs 2:17]—[shadows,] in the plural.” The word used here for shadows, *tselalim*, is evidently seen as being identical with *tse-lamim*, images. The *Zohar* does not tell us how this duality is to be understood; only the psychology of the later Kabbalists, especially that of the Lurianic school, attempted to explain this multiplicity of “shadow images” in man’s occult nature, which they identified as “sparks from the *tselem*.”³⁶ On the other hand, we learn from the same *Zohar* passage—and this is indeed striking—that a person can conjure up his *tse-lamim* by magical means, if he makes them available to the Other Side; in other words, he sells himself to the devil:

We find in the Book of Sorcery of Asmodai that if someone wishes to indulge in sorcery of the Left Side and immerse himself in it, he should stand in the light of a lamp, or in another place where his own images (*tse-lamim*) can be seen, and say the words prescribed for this kind of sorcery, and summon these unclean powers by their unclean names. He should then commit his images on oath to those he has summoned, and say that he is of his own free will prepared to obey their command. Such a man leaves the authority of his Creator and assigns his trust [i.e., the soul] to the power of uncleanness. And with these words of sorcery which he pronounces and [with which] he adjures the images, two spirits are revealed, and they are embodied in his images in human form, and they give him information both for good and evil purposes for particular occasions. These two spirits that were not comprised within a body³⁷ are now comprised in these images and are embodied in them.³⁸

On the one hand, we find here a survival of Iamblichus’s idea about the evocation of the personal daemon; on the other hand, this daemon, which was regarded by the early Neoplatonists in a wholly positive light,

is now seen in a wholly negative sense. The magician making a pact with the powers of the Left Side surrenders to them his *tselem*, which is manifested as shadow images; instead of the two forces of holiness that normally accompany him, two demonic spirits clothe themselves in his two shadows, serving him as guides and advisors. Conversely, the *Zohar* says nothing about the evocation of his personal guardian angel. Citations from admittedly fictitious sources, such as the *Book of King Solomon* and the *Book of Sorcery of Asmodai*, may allude to the occult sources used by the author, for example, the Hebrew translation of the *Picatrix*, which was widely circulated at the time (still partly extant today in MS. München 214).

But elsewhere in the *Zohar*, one does find a passage indicating that the author knew of the notion of the person's "higher self" as his guardian angel, which was incorporated within his theory of the *tselem*:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He made every creature in the world in the likeness (*diyokna*) that was suited to it, and afterward He created man in the most exalted likeness, and gave him dominion over all the others because of this likeness; for so long as man remains in the world, all the creatures in the world will raise their heads and gaze upon man's exalted likeness, and then they will be in fear and awe of him, as it is said, "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air" [Gen. 9:2]. What does this actually mean? When they look up and see that he has this likeness with the *neshamah* within him. Rabbi Eleazar said: Even if the *neshamah* is not within him, the righteous do not change from their original state when they had the likeness. But if man does not follow the ways of the Torah, the holy likeness vanishes from him, and the beasts of the field and the birds in the air can then rule over him. Once the holy likeness disappears, man's likeness also disappears. Come and see: the Holy One, blessed be He, transforms things in the upper and lower worlds, in order to restore things to their [rightful] place, and to fulfill His will in all the affairs of the world. Daniel did not change his likeness when he was in the lions' den; that is why he was saved.

Rabbi Hezekiah said: But is it not written, "My God sent His angel, and he shut the lions' mouths, and they did not harm me" (Dan. 6:23)? Does this not mean that it was because of the angel that shut their mouths that he escaped unharmed?

He said to him: This is indeed why he was not harmed, because the likeness of a righteous man is literally an angel, and he shut their mouths and bound them, in order to protect him, and to stop them from harming him. That is why it is written: "My God sent His angel"—the [angel] in whom all the likenesses in the world are engraved, he it was who sustained my likeness within me, so that they could have no power over me, and he it was who shut their mouths. Consequently, He really did send "His angel." This angel is the one in whom all the likenesses are engraved.³⁹

Even though the term *tselem* is not used here, it is the term regularly used by the *Zohar* for the form of man—that in which all the forms of the world are inscribed! The angel is thus the primal image of man himself, which frightens all the beasts because it is made in the image of God; the *tselem* of the righteous man is identical with the angel which protects him. This image of the *tselem* does not greatly differ from that of the "perfected nature," with which we became acquainted above. But we can go even further in identifying the *tselem* with the "perfected nature" of the hermetic texts—an identity suggested by another, quite unmistakable detail. As we read in the above quotations, both phenomena grow together with man's psychophysical organism. This growth also involves a different moral and metaphysical aspect—i.e., that man's higher self grows continually with man's good deeds. This idea is already clearly expressed in the Persian traditions about the *Daena* and the "splendid garment" of the soul in the Gnostic hymn in the *Acts of Thomas*; both these notions, as we have already noted, were likewise preserved in the *Zohar*.

The identification of the *tselem* with the astral body—an identification first found in the *Zohar*, as far as I can tell—was subsequently taken up by the later Kabbalists. Shemtov ben Shemtov (ca. 1400) writes the following about the constitution of the *tselem*:

It combines with the drop [of semen], and the person's body is built up from this drop; and the soul is bound to it and surrounds it from all sides through the mediation of this *tselem*. And by means of this *tselem* the body grows and becomes large . . . and the *tselem* is of fine material and not perceptible at all. It is a spiritual body, in which all the powers [of the soul] are imprinted in a physical but hidden manner, and upon it is built the body and all its powers. This is [what is meant by the verse] "And God created man in His own image (*tselem*)" [Gen. 1:27]—that is, in the *tselem* unique to him, which connects the body and the soul.⁴⁰

In brief, the *tselem* is the *principium individuationis* of the person.

As we already mentioned, the *Zohar* connects the notion of the *tselem* as an astral body with that of the garments worn by the soul prior to birth, which it again dons in Paradise after death. The fine-material ether, which is the air of Paradise, is parallel to the fine-material garment, identical to the holy, ethereal body in which the blissful spirits are clothed. Prior to the *Zohar*, the Kabbalah, continuing the tradition of *Merkavah* literature, knew only of the ethereal body given to a person after his death. It was in this way that Nahmanides and his disciples explained spiritualistic manifestations, in which the spirits of the dead appear to the living in the form of an ethereal body. The earliest Kabbalistic writings speak only of a garment put on by the soul after death, or of the garments assumed by the transfigured Enoch or Elijah when they ascended to heaven. Only after the souls "cast off" the filth of their earthly bodies can they put on "the body that radiates brilliance."⁴¹ Nahmanides followed these same lines when, in interpreting the paradoxical talmudic statement that the patriarch Jacob never died, he commented:

"'And he expired and was gathered' [Gen. 49:33]—Jacob our father did not die" [*Ta'anith* 5b]. The meaning of this midrash is that the souls of the righteous, like that Jacob, are gathered in the bundle of life, putting on a garment of splendor, so that they not remain uncovered. (*Ramban 'al ha-Torah*, to Gen. 49:33)

A number of authors who expounded the Kabbalistic passages in Nahmanides, including disciples of R. Solomon ben Adret and their contemporaries, differed in their interpretation of this passage. Instead of “a garment of splendor” (or, literally, “crimson”—*levushat ha-shani*), they read, probably more correctly, “a second garment” (*levushah ha-sheni*). Thus, R. Bahya ben Asher explains: “This body is the second, ethereal body in which the soul is enwrapped” after it departs from its first, earthly body.⁴² “When the righteous leave the world, their souls are restored to the bundle of life from whence they were taken . . . and He [God] prepares for them a perfect, very fine, ethereal garment, in which the righteous clothe themselves.”⁴³

These eschatological discussions from the school of Nahmanides share some of the atmosphere of the *Zohar*, which was written in Castile not long after Nahmanides’ death. But only one of these exegetes drew the further conclusion of regarding this “second garment” as already contained within man’s earthly body, thus identifying it with the astral body. This author was Joseph Angelino of Saragossa, who wrote in 1325 and evidently knew the *Zohar*, which he quotes in many places. Taking up the Neoplatonic conception of the astral body as mediating between the body and the soul, he writes:

The soul, because of its great subtlety, as it derives from the upper world, cannot combine with the coarse-material body until it becomes still more concealed. This is the second garment [in the Nahmanidean phrase], through which it enters into a fellowship with the body. And when [the soul] departs the body, it still has that second garment, so that it is not naked, and because of the fellowship [brought about through] that garment, it longs for the body at the resurrection of the dead, that the Creator’s will might be done in practice. . . . And this is a secret concealed in visions. . . .”⁴⁴

I will not venture an opinion as to whether the concluding words hint at an occult experience of the author himself, or whether it is meant to describe the doctrine of the astral garment per se as a great mystery, only revealed in a vision to those with “eyes of spirit.”

It is clear that for Angelino this astral body, which is not affected by man's physical death, is identical with the *uselem* in the *Zohar*. This view became the dominant one among the Kabbalists from the latter half of the fourteenth century on, determining the discussions of this topic by the Kabbalists of Safed and their disciples in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their discussions also run parallel to those of their Christian contemporaries, who were influenced by Renaissance Neoplatonism, despite the absence of any direct connection between the two groups. As the psychological theories of the Kabbalists became progressively more intricate, the theories of the various manifestations of the *uselem* became correspondingly more complex. Each one of the separate parts of the soul has its own garment or *uselem* enabling that part to operate within the body. Like the soul itself, these garments originate in the realms of divine emanation and in the hidden worlds that correspond to them; that is, the garments themselves are projections of higher light-beings onto the earthly existence of the soul. But with all these complications—especially in R. Hayyim Vital,⁴⁵ and in R. Menahem Azariah de Fano who, although writing in Italy, was heavily influenced by the Kabbalah of Safed⁴⁶—the basic notion of the *uselem* as an astral body is consistently maintained. Hence, the occult experience of actually seeing the *uselem* always remains a possibility. Even the latest Kabbalists maintain the experience of self-encounter as the ultimate initiation experience into the world of esoteric knowledge (an idea that was our point of departure); to explicate this idea, they cite the passage from *Shushan Sodoth* with which we opened our discussion.⁴⁷

This tradition, reformulated in messianic terms, exerted a profound attraction for the Sabbatian heretics. Jacob Frank, the leader of the radical, nihilistic wing of this sect in the eighteenth century, was well aware of this. He challenged his followers to pursue with him the mystical Jacob and his brother Esau, casting off all external forms. At the place of their destination, the meeting with "the elder brother," Frank promised them that they would know themselves, because there "they would see their own images." Frank even testifies of himself: "I cannot yet see myself, because my body is still too coarse in its material."⁴⁸ The seeing of one's

own self is thus turned from a prophetic into a messianic experience: man encounters himself at the moment of redemption where, according to this religious nihilism, all other forms and shapes drop away from him and sink into the abyss of nothingness.

Notes

FOREWORD

1. Schocken Books, 1965. Translated from the German by Ralph Manheim.
2. The year of publication was not mentioned in the book itself. See the *Bibliography of the Writings of Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1977), No. 390.
3. The sixth article in the present collection was never published separately; and see below, n. 11. Part of the article on the *Tsaddik* was published as "The Doctrine of the Righteous in Jewish Mysticism," in *Synagogue Review*, 34 (1960), pp. 189–195. Scholem's well-known essay on Jewish messianism was also originally an Eranos lecture (now published as the opening article in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).
4. *Pirkey Yesod be-Havana ha-Kabbala u-Semaleha*.
5. (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1957). Translated into English as *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
6. Published by Walter de Gruyter; and in English as *Origins of the Kabbalah*, translated by Allan Arkush and edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Philadelphia and Princeton: Jewish Publication Society and Princeton University Press, 1987). One cannot overemphasize the importance and centrality of this book in Scholem's work. He published it in four editions, the first as an article in Hebrew in 1947 (*Knesset le-Zekher Bialik*, 10, pp. 179–228), and then as a Hebrew book (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1948), then in German in 1962, and then as a four-volume series in Hebrew, the summaries of his four-year course on the subject at the Hebrew University, Akademion, Jerusalem, 1962–1965. He began this work with his Ph.D. thesis on the *Sefer ha-Bahir* and never ceased checking and rechecking his conclusions. I described this process in the chapter "The Early Kabbalah" in my *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension in Jewish History*, (New York: New York University Press, 1987), pp. 147–187 (previously published as "Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction of the Early Kabbalah," *Modern Judaism*, 5 [1985], pp. 39–66). This series of studies by Scholem presented a detailed analysis of the process of the emergence of the Kabbalah in the Middle Ages from non-Kabbalistic ancient sources.
7. See the list of his books in the *Bibliography* (above, n. 2), pp. 58 (in Hebrew), 63 (in English).
8. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Berlin, 1932), vol. 9, cols. 630–732.
9. New York: Schocken Books, 1941; rev. ed., 1946; 2nd ed., 1954.
10. *Mehkarim u-Mekorot le-Toledot ha-Shabta'ut ve-Gilguleha* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974).
11. There is one exception—the study "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," the second one in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, which was first pub-

lished as an article in *Diogenes*, 14 (1956), pp. 65–94. This was an international journal, published by UNESCO in several languages, widely read by the international scholarly community. Concerning the history of the Eranos Society, see William McGuire, *Bollingen: An Adventure in Collecting the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, rev. ed. 1989). Scholem's participation is described on pp. 152–154.

12. Scholem gave a course on the history of the Sabbatian movement at the Hebrew University in 1955. I clearly remember his saying, when describing the Sabbatians' reinterpretation of the *Zohar* to conform to the biography of Sabbatai Zevi, that "if one did not know better, one could easily be convinced by their hermeneutics."

13. "Was Rabbi Moses de Leon the Author of the *Zohar*?" *Mada'ei ha-Yahadut*, vol. I (Jerusalem, 1926), pp. 16–26.

14. *Major Trends*, pp. 156–204.

15. *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, ed. Fishel Lachower, Isaiah Tishby (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1957), pp. xvii–cxvi. An English translation of this classical work, by David Goldstein, was recently published: *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Fishel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), an introduction, pp. 1–126. The translation is distributed in the United States by B'nai B'rith International.

16. Published in *Sura*, III (1958), pp. 25–92. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky published a refutation of Belkin's thesis in the *Journal of Jewish Studies*, X (1959), pp. 25–44, 112–135; cf. Scholem's remark in *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), p. 57.

17. Weinstock published his thesis in *Tarbits*, 32 (1963), pp. 153–159, and Scholem responded to it in the same volume, pp. 252–265. See also Weinstock's collection of articles, *Be-Maagley ha-Nigleh veka-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1969).

18. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 112–155. See the reviews by Isaiah Tishby, in *Zion*, 54 (1989), pp. 209–222, 469–492 (and Idel's responses there, pp. 223–240; 493–508), and by Robert Alter, *Commentary*, 88 (1989), pp. 53–59.

1: *SHI'UR KOMAH*: THE MYSTICAL SHAPE OF THE GODHEAD

1. Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin, 1934), p. 58.

2. Samson Raphael Hirsch translated this, characteristically enough, as *Gestaltung Gottes* (Formation of God).

3. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis, übersetzt und erklärt*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen, 1917), p. 122.

4. Benno Jacob, op. cit.

5. The two most important *Shi'ur Komah* texts were printed in the book *Merkavah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1922). The former text speaks in the name of Rabbi Akiba, ff. 32a–33b; the latter, consisting of several pieces, ff. 34a–43a, speaks in the name of Rabbi Ishmael. Another fragment, f. 44a–b is attributed to Akiba. These texts were previously known only in the extremely corrupt form in which they were printed in *Sefer Razi'el* (Amsterdam, 1701). Two manuscripts of *Shi'ur Komah* versions have par-

tially survived on parchment pages in the Cairo Genizah: one is at Oxford, Hebr. C 65, the other in the Sasson Collection, MS. 522; both were first identified by me. Further fragments are extant in *Hekhaloth Rabbati* and *Hekhaloth Zutrat*, the former in the name of Rabbi Ishmael and the latter in that of Rabbi Akiba. Another fragment is preserved in the so-called *Alphabet of Rabbi Akiba*, which, to be sure, was edited later than the above-mentioned pieces but nevertheless preserved a great deal of the old *Merkavah* material. The work of the Karaite Solomon ben Jeroham, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, ed. I. Davidson (New York, 1934), pp. 113–124, contains many passages taken from *Shi'ur Komah*.

6. In *Hekhaloth Zutrat*, MS. Oxford, Neubauer 1551, f. 40b.

7. *Merkavah Shelemah*, f. 30a.

8. Ibid., f. 34a–b. This passage, together with another from the then as-yet-unpublished *Sefer Razi'el*, are translated in Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, *Entdecktes Judentum* (Frankfurt, 1700), vol. 1, pp. 2–4. The translator is highly indignant about the alleged blasphemies in those passages, no less so than the Karaite polemicists were when dealing with this subject in their attacks on rabbinic Judaism a thousand years earlier.

9. Cf. *Hagigah* 13b; *Exodus Rabbah* 1:21.

10. This introductory passage conflates Isaiah 6:1 and I Kings 22:19.

11. *Merkavah Shelemah*, f. 37a.

12. Ibid., f. 40a.

13. Cf. especially the texts of St. Hippolytus and St. Irenaeus in Irenaeus, *Adversus haereseos*, ed. Harvey, vol. 1, pp. 114–188, esp. pp. 128–134 (I, 14, 1–2). Cf. the discussions and partial translations of A. Neander, *Genetische Entwicklung der vornehmsten gnostischen Systeme* (Berlin, 1818), p. 168–187; A. Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums* (Leipzig, 1884), pp. 369–384; W. Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis* (Jena, 1910), pp. 189–201; H. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (Leipzig, 1924), pp. 326–349. Regarding Gnostic linguistic theory and, above all, the theory of the name, one should note especially *The Gospel of Truth*, which appears among the Gnostic papyri found in Nag Hammadi. For the relevant passages, cf. Hans Martin Schenke, *Die Herkunft des sogenannten Evangelium Veritatis* (Göttingen, 1959), pp. 38–40, 51–54. This translation constitutes a further advance over the one in the first edition by Malinine, Puech, and Quispel.

14. M. Gaster, "Das Schiur Komah," in his *Studies and Texts* (London, 1925–1928), vol. II, pp. 1330–1353. This paper first appeared in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, vol. 37 (1893).

15. Irenaeus, op. cit., p. 129. Almost the same idea appears in *The Treatise of the Three Rings*, one of the writings of Nag Hammadi (MS. Jung), in his formulations concerning the nature of the logos, the divine word that is Christ, as being the image of that which has no image, the body of that which is without body, etc.

16. Cf. Josef Keil, "Ein rätselhaftes Amulett," *Wiener Jahreshfte*, 32 (1940), pp. 79–84. The Hebrew portion of the inscription, which Keil and Ludwig Blau could not

decipher, is purely Jewish. The second line contains the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 28:58.

17. *Alpha-Betha de-Rabbi 'Akiva*, in Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash*, III, p. 25.

18. In the name of Simeon ben Lakish in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Shekalim* 6:1, end; *Sotah* 8:3, end; *Canticles Rabbah* 5:11. In *Midrash Kohen*, it states: "It [i.e., the Torah] was written in black fire upon white fire, and was connected upon the arm of the Holy One, blessed be He" (Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, II, p. 23). We likewise find in one of the *Shi'ur Komah* fragments that God's left hand is spoken of in the following terms: "The whole world hangs from it like an amulet from the arm of a hero." Cf. my *Buch Bahir* (Berlin, 1923), p. 110.

19. We wonder if the expression used by St. Paul in Philippians 3:21 concerning the transfigured body of Jesus, *σῶμα τῆς δόξης*, is not the same as that which later appears in the *Shi'ur Komah* teaching as "body of splendor" (*guf ha-kavod*) or "body of the Shekhinah" (*guf ha-Shekhinah*).

20. *Pesikta Rabbati*, ed. Ish-Shalom, p. 98b. Concerning the garment of God, see my book *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960), pp. 57–64, 131–132.

21. *Die Pseudoklementinen* I, "Homilien," ed. B. Rehm (Berlin, 1953), pp. 232–233; cf. *ibid.*, p. 59, Homily 3, §7.

22. See Heinrich Graetz, "Die mystische Literatur in der gaonäischen Epoche," *MGWJ*, 8 (1859), pp. 67–78, 103–118, 140–152, which has misled many readers. Scharastani himself (in T. Haarbrücker's translation, vol. I, p. 116), from whom Graetz drew, quite correctly claimed that the anthropomorphistic schools in Islam arose under Jewish influence.

23. I.e., *mishnayot*. Origen uses the Greek word *deuteroses*.

24. Origen, *Prologus in Canticum*, *Patrologia Latina* XIII, p. 63.

25. See *Hagigah* 13a, and *Kiddushin* 71a (regarding the transmission of the Name of 42 Letters "to one who is modest and humble and stands halfway through his life.")

26. *Menahot* 45a.

27. See S. Lieberman, *Midrashei Teman* (Jerusalem, 1940), pp. 13–17.

28. Cf. Friedrich Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (Wiesbaden, 1958), p. 15.

29. *Hekhaloth Zutrati*, MS. Oxford 1531, f. 45b. Cf. my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 40.

30. Cf. Lieberman, pp. 118–126.

31. Gaster writes: "We must seek the origin [of the *Shi'ur Komah*] in a time when conscious opposition to God's humanization through means of anthropomorphic understanding and imagery was not yet developed. The inherent danger of this was only realized after the spread of Christianity; that also gave rise to the tannaitic protest against the existing translations of the Bible. Only in this context is it possible to understand the reluctance concerning the giving of instruction in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, and even the prohibition against dealing with it. It did not, as has previously been assumed, lead to an abstract philosophy but, on the contrary, to a grossly sensual conception of the Deity, which was bound to have consequences destructive to ethical

Judaism and to the maintenance of the spiritualistic conception of the Deity" (op. cit., p. 1340).

32. Cf. my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 67.

33. "As the image of his Creator shall be is his image, as the form of His stature shall be his stature." Cf. my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 124, n. 30.

34. Cf., e.g., Solomon ben Jeroham, *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, pp. 114–124, who writes against Saadiah Gaon: "... who says that he has found wisdom and knowledge and understanding, and all secrets of the wisdom of your teachers. But I do not see you find anything but shame and contempt—the image of the form which you have chiseled out, and the measure in which you take pride."

35. Cf. B. M. Lewin, ed., *Otsar ha-Ge'onim: Haggigah, Helek ha-Teshuvah* (Jerusalem, 1931), p. 10.

36. Ibid., *Berakhoth*, p. 17. The wording of the Arabic original is brought from a Yemenite manuscript by Joseph Kapah, *Yahaduth Teman* (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 408. R. Saadiah dealt with the problem of the *Shi'ur Komah* several times.

37. *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. J. Blau (Jerusalem, 1957), §117, vol. I, pp. 200–201, and see the notes there. On Maimonides' change of mind, see S. Lieberman, in his appendix to my *Jewish Gnosticism*, p. 124, and Alexander Altmann, in the article mentioned in the next note, pp. 231–232.

38. Narboni's letter on *Shi'ur Komah* is published in a critical version and with an English translation by Alexander Altmann, in his *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 225–288.

39. See Simeon ben Tsemah Duran, *Magen Avot* (Livorno, 1784), f. 21b.

40. On the history of the interpretations of and polemics about the *Shi'ur Komah* among medieval authors, especially the philosophers, cf. A. Schmiedl, *Studien über jüdische, insbesondere jüdisch-arabische Religionsphilosophie* (Vienna, 1869), pp. 249–251; J. Hamburger, *Realencyclopädie des Judentums*, vol. II, p. 578; D. Kaufman, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters* (Gotha, 1877), pp. 86, 217, 497.

41. *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*, 7, iv. This work was written in Spanish by a Kabbalist from Marrano circles during the first third of the seventeenth century, and was published in Hebrew translation in Amsterdam, 1655. Cf. C. Knorr von Rosenroth: *Kabbala denudata*. Apparatus in librum Sohar, pars tertia et quarta, liber ... Porta Coelorum, (Sulzbach, 1678), pp. 147–148.

42. Cf. *Zohar*, III, 109b (*Ra'ya Mehemna*); *Tikkunei Zohar*, §70, p. 127a. [All translations from the *Zohar* and *Tikkunei Zohar*, except where otherwise stated, are by the editor, and are based upon Scholem's translation from the Aramaic that appears in the Hebrew edition of this book.—Ed.]

43. *Pardes Rimmonim* (Cracow, 1592), VI, 8, p. 38b.

44. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, S §85; M §119. There are two main editions of the text of *Sefer ha-Bahir*, each of which divides the text into numbered sections in completely different ways. These are: (1) *Das Buch Bahir* (*Sepherha-Bahir; Ein Text auf der Frühzeit der Kabbala*,

auf Grund eines kritischen Textes ins Deutsche übersetzt und kommentiert von Gerhard Scholem. Dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, München (Berlin, 1923). [Reprinted: Darmstadt, 1970.] (2) *Sefer ha-Bahir, ha-nikra Midrasho shel R. Nehunyah ben ha-Kanah*, ed. Reuben Margalioth (Jerusalem, 1951). Subsequent references to the *Bahir* will cite both editions: Scholem (S) and Margalioth (M), followed by the respective section numbers in each.

45. Regarding the ninth and tenth *Sefiroth*, cf. the detailed expositions in chapters 3 and 4 of this book.

46. See on this Yosef Ben-Shlomo, *Torat ha-ʿElohut shel R. Moshe Cordovero* (Jerusalem, 1965).

47. At times *Hokhmah* is the head, and *Binah* is the throat or the two eyes, while *Keter* is interpreted as the crown characterizing the primal human being in his kingly dignity (cf., e.g., Gaster, *Studies and Texts*, II, pp. 1348). In another development of this symbolism, which prepared the way for the doctrine of the *ʿIdra*, the first *Sefirah* itself is conceived as *ʿAdam Kadmon*, while later on this term is used for the entire Sefirotic system. The term is employed in this manner, for example, by Jacob and Isaac ha-Kohen of Soria, while in the *Zohar* itself, it occurs only in the latest strata. The *Tikkunei Zohar*, probably in contrast to other, more general symbolisms, speaks of *ʿadam kadmon le-kol ha-kedumim*—Adam as preceding all other primordial beings. In *Tikkunei Zohar Hadash*, the destruction of the primal worlds is ascribed not to the Holy Ancient One but to *ʿAdam Kadmon* (Warsaw, 1885), f. 114d.

48. *Zohar*, III, 144a, at the end of the *ʿIdroth*.

49. *Zohar*, III, 128a–b.

50. Genesis 36 reports of the Edomite kings only that each one built a city and died; according to the *Zohar*’s reading, each one corresponded to a world having a specific structure, which was subsequently destroyed.

51. *Zohar*, II, 176a.

52. English: *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, arranged by Fishel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, translated from the Hebrew by David Goldstein (Oxford, 1989), I, p. 335. “And if you say: Who is *Atika Kadisha*? come and see. Beyond the heights above there is that which is not known, is not recognized, and is not described, and it comprises everything, and two heads are comprised in it. And everything is prepared thus. And [*ʿAtika Kadisha*] is not in number, or in thought, or in calculation, but in the devotion of the heart. Of this it is said, ‘I said: I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue’ (Ps. 39:2).”

53. According to talmudic halakhah, the nose is the feature that makes the face identifiable; cf. *Yevamoth* 120b.

54. A play on words: the Hebrew word for “forbearing” is *maʿarikh apo*, literally, “holding one’s nose-breath for a long time.”

55. English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I, pp. 337–339.

56. Later Kabbalists such as Cordovero go even further in this direction. A person, by taking the character of each *Sefirah* as a moral standard for his own conduct in

accordance with the Torah, reflects and imitates the mystical shape of God through his own deeds, virtually sculpting a replica of that shape out of his own actions; cf. Cordovero's widely circulated Kabbalistic ethical work, *Tomer Devorah* (translated into English as *The Palm Tree of Deborah*, introduction and notes by Louis Jacobs, London, 1960).

57. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1955), vol. IV, p. 370.

2: SITRA AHRA: GOOD AND EVIL IN THE KABBALAH

1. I have published the pertinent writings of this author in *Mada'ei ha-Yahaduth*, II (Jerusalem, 1927).

2. *Genesis Rabbah* 9:1, ed. Theodor, p. 68.

3. This tractate was published by A. Jellinek, *Ginzei Hokhmah ha-Kabbalah* (Leipzig, 1853), pp. 1–8. Regarding the date of its composition, see my article on this subject in the German-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1929), vol. III, cols. 801–803.

4. Cf. my book *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 131–133 [now available in English: *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Philadelphia and Princeton, 1987), pp. 148–151—Ed.], and *Sefer ha-Bahir*, S §14; M §22.

5. Cf. below, chapter 4, toward the end of sec. VI.

6. I have made use of the following Hebrew manuscripts: Oxford, Christ Church College 198, ff. 7b–8b; Leiden, Warner 93, f. 54b; Rome, Casanatense 179, f. 96a.

7. The word used here, *devarim*, is also understood by these circles in the sense of *logoi*, i.e., celestial powers, and it is in this sense that it is used further on as well.

8. *Kiddushin* 82a.

9. *Genesis Rabbah* 47:8 and passim, ed. Theodor, pp. 475, 793, 983.

10. Spelled here without the *'alef*, as *ve-nitmeitem* instead of *ve-nitmei'tem*; the author therefore sees here the Hebrew word *met* (dead).

11. *Berakhoth* 33a.

12. *Genesis Rabbah*, 19: 4, ed. Theodor, p. 172.

13. *Bava Batra* 16a.

14. *Pesahim* 21b.

15. *Genesis Rabbah* 21: 5, ed. Theodor, p. 200.

16. That the two trees in this passage actually represent the *Sefiroth* of *Yesod* and *Malkhuth* is confirmed by a parallel passage in R. Ezra of Gerona's *Perush ha-Aggadot* (MS. Vatican 294, f. 27a–b), whose symbolism unequivocally indicates these two *Sefiroth*. The present passage simultaneously confirms Ezra's authorship of this piece, as documented at the end of the Oxford manuscript.

17. In this interpretation Adam's original sin is identical to that of the fallen angels; in both cases there is the demiurgical presumption of a creature to imitate

God. Such a use of this idea can be found in classic form in, e.g., Abraham Saba, *Tseror ha-Mor* (Venice, 1567), f. 8a–b.

18. Gikatilla returns to this idea repeatedly in his commentary on Ezekiel's *Mer-kavah* vision (extant in manuscript). On the other hand, Moses de Leon's Hebrew writings speak of two kinds of "residue" left by the process of emanation, on the right and left sides—that is, from the *Sefirah* of *Hesed* as well. This idea is particularly prominent in his important piece on the symbolism of removing *hamets* for Passover, printed anonymously in Judah ibn Khalaz, *Sefer ha-Musar* (Mantua, 1560), p. 57a; it also exists in collections of authentic pieces by Moses de Leon, in MS. Vatican 428 and in a manuscript in the Schocken Library in Jerusalem.

19. Satan is identified with the "other god" (*el aḥer*) of Exodus 34:14. The radical Catharists used an analogous terminology, speaking of Satan as *deus alienus*; cf. A. Borst, *Die Katharer* (Stuttgart, 1953), p. 153.

20. [The English translation of this passage is based upon *The Zohar*, trans. H. Sperling and M. Simon (London, 1933), I, 71–74.—Ed.]

21. Cf. *Zohar*, II, 103a. On the concept of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the *Zohar*, see the detailed treatment of Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1957), vol. I, pp. 285–359 [see now in English translation: *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, II, pp. 447–528.—Ed.]. Tishby selected the most important passages on this topic in the Aramaic text, translated them into Hebrew, and analyzed them.

22. This explanation of *tehi* (serpent) from *Sefer Yetsirah* still appears in Joseph Caro's interpretation; cf. R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (London, 1962), p. 32.

23. A talmudic expression (*Ta'anith* 28b), used here to signify the confusion of the realms of the holy and the unholy.

24. This work is preserved in several manuscripts, e.g., Leiden—Cod. Warner 32, ff. 155b–156a. A portion of the Hebrew text is reprinted in my *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), pp. 405–406.

25. This interpretation of the serpent has a peculiar affinity to that of several later Christian theosophists: e.g., Antoinette Bourignon, whose discussion, like that of many of Jacob Boehme's followers, reproduces the early Kabbalistic trains of thought. Cf. Ernst Schering, "Adam und die Schlange," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 10 (1958), pp. 104–108.

26. This issue was first raised in the fourteenth-century Kabbalistic work, *Sefer ha-Peli'ah* (Korets, 1784), f. 95d.

27. L. Troje, *Adam und Zöe; eine Szene der altchristlichen Kunst in ihrem religionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhange* (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften [Heidelberg, 1916]).

28. One might perhaps say that, for Gikatilla, Adam's sin lay in anticipating a state in which, in due time, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge would become edible. That time is the Redemption! The idea that this sin was a premature anticipation of the ultimate messianic state occurs sporadically in the Sabbatian Kabbalah and in later

Hasidic literature, as Joseph Weiss has demonstrated with regard to R. Mordechai Joseph Leiner of Izbica; see his article "Eine spätjüdische Utopie religiöser Freiheit," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, 32 (1963), pp. 235–280.

29. A particularly influential version of Lurianic Kabbalah has survived from this Kabbalist, who was active at the end of the sixteenth century, albeit it did not reflect the authentic teaching of R. Isaac Luria. See my article "Israel Sarug—Disciple of Luria?" (Heb.), *Zion*, 5 (1940), pp. 214–243.

30. This opinion was already advocated prior to Sarug, in a certain sense, by Meir ben Gabbai, who states in *Avodath ha-Kodesh*, IV, 12 that, before Adam's sin, good and evil were still connected, because "the fine wine was still mixed with its sediment and the silver was not yet refined of its dross." That is, the reality of evil as *kelippah* was first actualized by Adam's fall.

31. See sec. V of my essay "Kabbalah and Myth" in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), pp. 109–117.

32. This book was never printed, but handwritten copies were widely circulated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the text is still extant in some thirty manuscripts. A synopsis of its main theses was produced by Jacob Koppel Lifschütz, who lived in Volhynia during the first half of the eighteenth century, and is included in the first part of his magnum opus, *Sha'arei Gan Eden* (Korets, 1803). Cf. I. Tishby, *Netivei Emunah u-Minuth* (Ramat Gan, 1964), pp. 204–226, 331–343, who demonstrates the Sabbatian character of this book.

33. I have analyzed these ideas in my book *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah: 1626–1676*, trans. R. J. Zvi Werblowsky (Princeton, N.J., 1973).

34. C. Wirszubski, "The Sabbatian Theology of Nathan of Gaza" (Heb.), *Keneset* 8 (1944), pp. 215, 227.

3: TSADDIK: THE RIGHTEOUS ONE

1. [This typology is discussed at greater length in the author's essay "Three Types of Jewish Piety," *Ariel*, 32 (1973), pp. 5–24.—Ed.]

2. Rudolf Mach, *Der Zaddik in Talmud und Midrasch* (Leiden, 1957).

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–13.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

5. Cf. the chapter on Hasidism in medieval Germany in my *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 80–118.

6. Many sections of *Sefer Haredim* by R. Eliezer Azikri of Safed are typical of this sort of Hasidic mood. His central thesis is that a person should be careful about observing all of the *mitzvot*, but should choose a particular one in which he will be especially steadfast—"with great power and persistence, that he not violate it his entire life." The reason given for this is that one who takes hold of one branch of a

beautiful tree will find that he may draw all of the branches toward him, while if he attempts to hold fast of all the branches at once, he will be unable to hold onto them.

7. Cf. Mach, pp. 6–7. Several of the legends cited in Mach's discussion of the charismatic power of the *Tsaddik* (pp. 110–133) pertain to such *Hasidim*. There is no ground for the denial of the charismatic character of the *Hasid* in Lazar Gulkowitsch's otherwise instructive monograph *Die Bildung des Begriffes Hasid* (Tartu, 1935), with which Mach was unfamiliar. Cf. now the detailed discussion of the concept of the *Hasid* in rabbinic thought in Ephraim E. Urbach, *Ḥazal; Pirkei Emunot ve-De'ot* (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 427–454. [English: *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 483–511.]

8. Many of these stories were collected and discussed by Gulkowitsch. Cf. also L. Jacobs, "The Concept of Hasid in the Biblical and Rabbinic Literature," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 8 (1957), pp. 143–154.

9. Cf. Mach, pp. 28–30, 94.

10. Ibid., pp. 244–245.

11. Cf. A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God, Vol. I: The Names and Attributes of God* (London, 1927), pp. 95–96.

12. *Midrash Tehillim* on Psalm 7, ed. S. Buber, f. 34a–b.

13. Kabbalistic symbolism draws a distinction between *Din* and *Mishpat* ("law" and "judgment") and *Tsaddik* and *Tsedek* ("righteous" and "righteousness").

14. The word *Sefiroth* barely appears in *Sefer ha-Bahir*; instead, it employs such terms as *middah* (attribute), *ma'amar* (logos), and *koah* (potency).

15. See my *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 109–159. [English: *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 123–180.]

16. In the extant text, *Sefer ha-Bahir* does not refer to *Netsah* and *Hod*, as these *Sefiroth* are universally known later on, but refers instead to "two *Netsahim*," drawing no distinction between the function of the two. The schema of the ten *Sefiroth* is still in flux in the *Bahir*, and many of its formulations of the sequence and structure of the last four *Sefiroth* do not match the structure of the Sefirotic tree as it was later accepted and fixed.

17. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, S §104; M §155–156.

18. See below, with regard to *Bahir*, S §14; M §22.

19. The Hebrew *shavat va-yinafash*, normally rendered as "He rested," is here interpreted literally as derived from the root *nefesh* (soul).

20. In the *Bahir*, S §39; M §57, we read the following about the identification of the first days with the *Sefiroth*: "The Holy One, blessed be He, made six beautiful vessels. What are they? The Heaven and the Earth. But are they not seven? And it is written, 'and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested' (Exod. 31:17). What does 'rested' mean? It teaches that the Sabbath sustains all souls, as is written, 'He rested' (*va-yinafash*; lit., 'took soul' or 'breath'). According to M §157, quoted in the text, the seventh *Sefirah* is not located beneath the other six, but is in the center, between the three higher and three lower ones. Elsewhere in this book these six are

identified with the six primal spacial directions, while in later Kabbalah the six directions were identified with the lower *Sefiroth*, from the fourth to the ninth. In this manner the seventh *Sefirah* corresponds to the Holy Tabernacle in Jerusalem, located in the center of the world (see *Bahir*, S §103; M §154). The image of the sanctuary being aligned with the center of the world is already present in *Sefer Yetsirah*, 4, iii, in connection with the doctrine of the *Sefiroth*. In the *Bahir* there are still contradictory interpretations of the symbolism of the spatial directions, which it would be futile to attempt to harmonize here.

21. Moses de Leon interprets Hosea 14:9, "I am like a leafy cypress-tree, from Me is thy fruit found," in terms of the origin of the soul as the fruit of the Tree of God. Cf. my translation of the *Bahir*, p. 69. This exegesis derives from R. Ezra of Gerona's Kabbalistic commentary on the Song of Songs.

22. The symbolism of the cardinal points is very strange here. The two *netsahim* correspond to the two legs of the human being, or to Northwest and West. The source of this conception has never been explained.

23. Cf. my *Major Trends*, pp. 54–58.

24. The *Bahir* passage reads: "Why do we say [in the liturgical formula preceding the performance of any *mitzvah*] 'who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us,' rather than 'that You have sanctified us . . . and You have commanded us?' This teaches that the Life of the Universe is included in all of the commandments, and that with His mercy He gave them to us, in order to sanctify us with them, that we may perhaps be worthy. For what reason? Because in the hour that we, in this world, become worthy of the World to Come, it [the Life of the World] will be great." This motif is the same as that found above in S §102; M §153: the supreme *Tsaddik* grows and is strengthened by the good deeds performed by the righteous in the world.

25. *Bahir*, S §121; M §178, reads: "Whence do we know that each of these seven *middoth* is called a stream? As is written, 'from Matanah to Nahaliel' (Num. 21:9). Do not read 'Nahaliel' but *Nahal El* (the stream of God). And all six follow one route to the sea. And what is that route? The mediator among them, as is written, 'Before him goeth the pestilence, and fiery bolts go forth at his feet' (Hab. 3:5). And all go to the selfsame channel, and from that channel to the sea. . . . And this channel is called 'a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon' (Song of Songs 4:15). And what is Lebanon? One might say: [Divine] Wisdom (*Hokhmah*)." This parallels the statement at the beginning of S §125 (M §183): "We bless the Holy One, blessed be He, who pours out His Wisdom to this Life of the Worlds, and he gives All." Here too there is a direct link between *Hokhmah* and *Hai ha-'Olamim*.

26. In S §55; M §82, an additional parallel is made between the celestial potencies and the limbs of a human being, but there only seven parts are enumerated because "the phallus and a man's wife are reckoned as one." On the other hand, S §114; M §168 reduces the eight parts to seven by counting the torso and the phallus as one, and the female as one. This latter sequence became generally accepted in later Kabbalah.

27. I find no indication that the Slavonic Book of Enoch was composed by a Christian author. The arguments on behalf of this theory and the alleged proof of New Testament influences cited by A. Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d'Enoch* (Paris, 1952) do not strike me as convincing. See especially pp. x–xii of the introduction to this otherwise highly meritorious edition. The supposed New Testament parallels are phrases that could as easily have been used by any contemporary Jewish author influenced by Hebrew or Greek, and are devoid of any specifically Christian content. The supposed parallels to the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount are purely Jewish idioms, and it is a mystery to me why any utterance beginning with the Hebrew word *ashrei* (“happy” or “blessed”), a phrase appearing in dozens of rabbinic sources, is assumed to be Christian. The “dwellings” in the great aeon supposedly come from John 14:2, but the author does not realize that this is a widespread notion in Jewish eschatology; and so on ad infinitum. The attentive reader of this new edition is bound to come to the opposite conclusions of the editor. Regarding the Jewish character of the Book of Enoch, cf. the instructive remarks of Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (New York, 1925), vol. V, pp. 158–162.

28. Vaillant's suggested etymology of this name (p. xi) from *'ado* (“His eternity, His eon”) is lamentable Hebrew, as the word *'ad* has the characteristic of not combining with pronominal suffixes. Charles's explanation as *yado* (i.e., “God's hand”) is no better.

29. II Enoch 24, 25:5 (Version A). English translation: R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Vol. II: *Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford, 1913), p. 445. [A. Kahana, *Ha-Sefarim ha-Hitsanim* (Tel Aviv, 1960), 11:6–14.]

30. Ibid., 65:6–8, pp. 467–468. [Kahana, 17:4–6.]

31. Cf. my paper “Schöpfung aus Nichts und Selbstverschränkung Gottes,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1956 25 (Zürich, 1957), pp. 107–114.

32. *Zohar Hadash* (Warsaw, 1885), f. 7d.

33. *Sha'arei Or* (Offenbach, 1715), f. 19b [Dorot ed., p. 93].

34. Ibid. R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Cohen of Segovia, who wrote one generation before Gikatilla, drew a parallel between the five main phases of man's life and the symbol of life. In his explanation of the Hebrew alphabet he writes: “Know that man's life hangs from the Spirit of Life, and the Spirit of Life from the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Life from the Root of the Tree of Life, and the Root of the Tree of Life from the Sap of Life, and the Sap of Life from the Light of Life, and the Light of Life from the Air of Life. This is indicated by *Sefer Yetsirah* [IV, 1]: “*Aleph*—Air; *Beth*—Life; He created, and that man's life is connected to them from level to level, and they are concealed from the eye of all living things. And when the perfectly righteous and pious depart from this world, their souls stand on these levels, which are known as [the Upper] Paradise, for these levels emanate from the Light of the Holy One, blessed be He.”—*Perush ha²-Otiot le-Rabbi Ya'akov ha-Kohen*, published by this author in *Mada'ei ha-Yahaduth*, II (Jerusalem, 1927), pp. 205–206. Hence, the *Sefiroth* as levels of true

life are parallel to the place from whence the blissful spirits contemplate the divine light.

35. *Sha'arei Orah*, f. 20b [Dorot ed., pp. 96–97]. This interpretation of the stations of the Israelites in the wilderness can already be found in the *Bahir*, 5 §121; M §178).

36. *Ibid.*, f. 22b [Dorot ed., p. 104].

37. *Sha'arei Tsedek* (Korets, 1785), f. 16a.

38. Cf. *Sha'arei Orah*, f. 22b [Dorot ed., p. 104].

39. *Ibid.*, f. 23b [Dorot ed., p. 106].

40. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Berlin, 1832), p. 245.

41. Developed in detail in *Sha'arei Orah*, ff. 29a–30a [Dorot ed., pp. 125–129].

42. In the writings of the Kabbalists of Gerona, especially R. Azriel and Nahmanides, the sexual symbolism is relatively weaker, although not entirely absent. The powerful eruption of the mythical element in the *Zohar* is connected to its use of such sexual symbolism throughout, at times extravagantly so.

43. Compare the passage in *Zohar*, II, 145b, which discusses in detail the relationship of the five middle *Sefiroth* (i.e., from *Hesed* to *Hod*) and *Yesod* itself, as the Tree of Life: “And it is the river coming from Eden, and it is Joseph the Righteous, who is called *Tsaddik*.” Because the Song of Songs deals with the union of *Tsaddik* and *Shekhinah*, it is known in the talmudic tradition as the Holy of Holies of Scripture. “Therefore, the Song of Songs is Holy of Holies, and there is no verse in this canticle which does not contain the mystery of the *alef* and the “five” [i.e., the five *Sefiroth* mentioned above, and the single phallus, called here *alef*—the first letter, and also one thousand]. . . . But why is the *alef* not indicated? The truth is that it is hidden and will remain hidden until the wife (the *Shekhinah*) unites herself with her husband. . . . As soon as he had completed making the Holy of Holies below, the mystery of the Holy of Holies above ascended and was hidden, so that the concealment of the Union might be complete above and below, according to the Divine purpose.” [*Zohar*, II, 145b] The secret of the Sanctum Sanctorum in the Temple clearly alludes to the motif of the sexual embrace of the two cherubim, a theme to which I will return in the text. The same symbolism of the Tree of Life can be found elsewhere in the *Zohar*: cf. I, 6a, 12b, 18a; II, 95b. See also Moses de Leon, *Shekel ha-Kodesh*, ed. A. W. Greenup (London, 1912), p. 69, where we read, “From this river the souls fly out, for it is the Tree of Life.” In a play on the words *ever* (phallus) and *bara* (created), which are written with the same Hebrew consonants, the author of the *Zohar* says, “There emerged the column which produces the generations—i.e., the phallus—the holy foundation upon which the world stands.” (I, 3b).

44. *Zohar*, I, 17a. [Eng.: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I, pp. 316–317.]

45. *Te'ubtha di-dakhora legabei nukva*; cf. *Zohar*, I, 35a, 60b, 85b, 209a, etc.

46. In a book on this subject written from a psychoanalytical standpoint—Jiri Langer, *Die Erotik der Kabbala* (Prague, 1923)—one finds a chaos of correct and incor-

rect, at times even completely imaginary things, said about this symbolism. A shortened version of this book was published by Alfons Rosenberg: *Liebesmystik der Kabbala* (Munich, 1956); see there especially the chapter "Die oberen Welten und ihre Erotik," pp. 96–116.

47. *Perush Shem ha-Meforash le-Rabbi Asher ben David*, ed. M. Chasida (mimeographed), in *ha-Segulah*, nos. 2–10 (Jerusalem, 1934), p. 10.

48. F. J. Molitor, "Versuch einer spekulativen Entwicklung der allgemeinen Grundbegriffe der Theosophie nach den Grundsätzen der Kabbala," in his *Philosophie der Geschichte oder Über die Tradition* (published anonymously), pt. II (Münster, 1834), pp. 108–109 (§§177, 179). Although Molitor, like many other adherents of the "Christian Kabbalah," was often led astray by his Christian background to make foolhardy reinterpretations, this chapter (pp. 52–172) is still valuable and impressive. It is almost forgotten today that Molitor was the only serious Christian authority on the Kabbalah during the age of German Idealism, and probably during the entire nineteenth century.

49. Cf. Molitor, pt. II, p. 120.

50. Eliezer Zweifel, *Shalom'al Yisrael* (Zhitomir, 1869), II, pp. 85–112.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

52. The sexual symbolism of the *Zohar* goes to extremes in a number of passages; see, e.g., I, 21b–22a, 162a–b; II, 128b–129a, 214b; III, 5a–b, 21a, 26a, 247a–b, 296a–b. It can hardly be regarded as coincidental that the opening lines of the *Zohar* begin with explicit sexual symbolism: the light of the five *Sefirot* that emanate from *Binah* "was hidden, and gathered as seed at the place of the covenant [i.e., the phallus], which penetrates the rose [i.e., the *Shekhinah*] and fecundates it. This is called 'a tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof' [Gen. 1:12], and this seed is found literally in the sign of the covenant" (*Zohar*, I, 1a). The main body of the *Zohar* ends on the same note (III, 296b), in a discussion of the holy marriage between Zion and Jerusalem, expressed in particularly daring sexual symbolism. Cf. below, chap. 4, sec. VI.

53. It is remarkable that in the *Zohar* the pure and restrained sexual life is associated with the category of the *Tsaddik* and not, as might have been expected, with that of the *Kadosh*, the saint or holy person. This latter connection is made in rabbinic literature: "He who holds back from forbidden sexual connections is called holy"—Jerusalem Talmud, *Yevamoth* 2:4. In both Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and in Abraham ben David of Posquiere's *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh*, the sections dealing with regulation of the sexual life are entitled, respectively, "The Book of Holiness" and "The Gate of Holiness."

54. *Sha'arei Orah*, f. 21b [Dorot ed., pp. 99–100]; and in *Sha'arei Tsedek*, f. 15c, where the *Sefirah* of *Yesod* is identified with *Tsaddik* because "it is a just balance and scales [i.e., the equilibrium between all things], and in it all the *mitzvot* and the worlds exist in perfect union, and it sustains all by the attribute of *Malkhuth*, and it stands in the center, above and below and on the sides."

55. *Midrash Tehillim*, ed. Buber, f. 236a.

56. *‘Avodath ha-Kodesh* (Lemberg, 1857), II, 3, f. 33a.

57. *Zohar*, II, 166b–167a [English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, I, p. 442.]

58. I will not discuss here the eschatological aspect of the notion of the *Tsaddik*, but would like to mention an extremely peculiar mythical motif containing something truly archetypal, in the Jungian sense. According to the Kabbalistic idea, the righteous live in Paradise in caverns—evidently corresponding to burial caves in this world. In *‘Emek ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1648), one of the most important texts of the later Kabbalah, we find the following passage (f. 88d): “All the caves of the righteous are in the form of an *‘akhna’i*, that is, a serpent biting its own tail, as mentioned in the *Sifra di-Tseni‘utha* [*Zohar*, II, 179a], in order to sweeten the sting of the Serpent.” The allusion to *Sifra de-Tseni‘utha* is to a difficult cosmogenic passage. In any event, *‘Emek ha-Melekh* uses this image of the Uroboros as an eschatological image for the final dwelling place of the righteous, in which everything returns to its original harmony and unity. This usage is linked to the fact that the poison of the serpent no longer kills, but is “sweetened”—that is, taken up and absorbed in the eschatological harmony of all things.

59. Bahya ben Asher, *Kad ha-Kemah*, ed. C. Breit, pt. II, p. 10a.

60. *Ibid.*, II, 104a.

61. Vital, *Sha‘arei Kedushah*, I, 3. The contrast between the *Tsaddik* and the *Ba‘al Teshuvah* is expressed in an entirely different direction in R. Isaiah Horowitz’s *Shenei Luhot ha-Berith* (1648), f. 188b, where the *Tsaddik* comes from the attribute of *Gevurah*, because he has conquered his own urge, while the *Ba‘al Teshuvah* originates in *Hesed* (because it is said of God that “His right arm is stretched forth to receive penitents”).

62. *Sefer ‘Ets Hayyim*, 39, i. Cf. Horowitz’s remarks cited in the previous note.

63. *Mesillath Yesharim*, chaps. 13, 26.

64. *Ibid.*, chap. 18.

65. See my detailed discussion of this concept in “*Devekut*, or Communion with God,” in my book *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays* (New York, 1971), pp. 203–227.

66. Comparison of the terminology used by R. Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, one of the first disciples and contemporaries of the Baal Shem Tov, who wrote in the 1760s, and that used some thirty or forty years later by the Besht’s grandson, R. Ephraim of Sudylkow, in his *Degel Mahaneh Ephraim*, provides cogent proof of this point.

67. An example of such an older definition of the terms *Hasid* and *Tsaddik* appears in the name of R. Dov Baer of Mezhirech, in a book by his disciple, Jacob Isaac Hurwitz, *Divrei Emet* (Zolkiew, 1808 [actually 1831]), f. 32b: “There is one whose entire desire and will is for the service of Heaven, and whatever he wishes to do is unimportant, but to go in the ways of God, may He be blessed. But when he engages in his [mundane] activities he does not cling to Him, may He be blessed, so much, and he forgets *devekuth*—and such a person is a *Tsaddik*. But there is another one who clings to Him more, and does not forget God even when he is engaged in acts that are dear

to him, like one who loves his only son, and in all his actions remembers his son—such a one is called a *Hasid*.” Cf. the homilies of another disciple, Shmelka Horowitz of Nikolsburg, *Divrei Shmuel* (Lemberg, 1868), f. 34a.

68. Israel Jaffe of Shklov, *Or Yisra'el* (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1702), Introduction, p. 3a. Scholars have failed to notice that this is the source for the similar polemics and expressions found in Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, which repeatedly quotes *Or Yisra'el*. Interestingly, when these lines appeared in 1780 in the said book, the earliest Hasidic work to be printed, they aroused fierce opposition among those attacked, while the no less radical assertions of the older authors (who were suspected by many of crypto-Sabbatianism) went unnoticed.

69. *Ori ve-Yish'i* (Berlin, 1714), chap. 12, f. 21a.

70. This connection was treated in detail, albeit in a different direction, by Joseph G. Weiss in his important work “The Beginnings of the Hasidic Path” (Heb.), *Zion*, 16 (1951), pp. 46–105. The author advances the thesis (dubious, in my opinion) that the Hasidic movement originated out of the professional disappointments and setbacks of these itinerant preachers, who were rejected by the learned strata.

71. *Me'or 'Enayim* (Slavita, 1798), f. 141c.

72. See my work on this subject, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, N.J., 1974).

73. Cf. my article “The Two Earliest Testimonies Concerning Hasidic Circles and the Besht” (Heb.), *Tarbits*, 20 (1949), pp. 228–240.

74. Martin Buber, in *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (New York, 1960), p. 27, said the following: “Because Hasidism in the first instance is not a category of teaching, but one of life, our chief source of knowledge of Hasidism is its legends, and only after them comes its theoretical literature.” This fundamental position, which crucially determined Buber’s presentation and interpretation of Hasidism, arouses basic misgivings and doubts both intrinsically and in terms of the critical use of the sources. See my article “Martin Buber’s Interpretation of Hasidism” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 228–250.

75. The Baal Shem Tov frequently repeats this distinction between the normal human being and the charismatic living beyond the realm of nature: “There are two kinds of people—one that behaves according to nature, and a second kind that is above nature. And thus [does God] behave with them”—*Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* (Korets, 1780), ff. 31a, 56a–b, etc.

76. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 184a.

77. Cf. my book *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), pp. 6–7, and in *Freundesgabe zum sechzigsten Geburtstag von Kurt Hirschfeld* (Zürich, 1962), pp. 115–122.

78. Cited in the name of the Besht in Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, *Ketonet Passim* (Lemberg, 1866), f. 13b.

79. Hasidic literature—one is tempted to say, unfortunately so—makes a far smaller distinction between the *Tsaddik* as helper of his fellowmen and the *Tsaddik* as

mediator between God and man than one might assume from Buber's presentation, which tries to minimize his role as mediator. However, the above-described Kabbalistic symbolism, which was accepted by the Hasidim, strongly suggests such a role.

80. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 59b.

81. *Ben Porat Yosef* (Korets, 1781), f. 11a.

82. *Ta'anith* 22a; cf. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 34a.

83. This doctrine, which is the Baal Shem Tov's chief esoteric doctrine, and emphasized as such by his disciples, was considered so dangerous that it was subsequently reinterpreted, under the influence of anti-Hasidic polemics, to the point that virtually nothing remained of it. In later Hasidic writings, it disappeared or was changed beyond recognition; scholarly presentations of Hasidism likewise ignore it. A laudable exception is the above-mentioned study by Joseph Weiss, whose detailed discussion of this doctrine is of great value.

84. A dictum of the Baal Shem Tov: "When the leader makes himself a vessel of the *Shekhinah*, the influx spreads from him to all his contemporaries"—*Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 88b.

85. "If so, you destroy the world. Since you draw from them their vitality, to lift and raise them up, the individual beings remain without their vitality"—R. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir, *Or ha-Me'ir* (Korets, 1798), f. 44b, in a sermon for the Sabbath of Repentance; cf. my article in *The Messianic Idea*, p. 242, and in this book, at the end of chap. 5.

86. That is how Rabbi Nachman of Tscherein summarizes the view of the Rabbi of Polonnoye; cf. his anonymously published anthology, *Leshon Hasidim* (Lemberg, 1876), f. 82a.

87. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 4a.

88. This refers to Maimonides' interpretation in *Guide for the Perplexed*, III, 51, of the stature of Moses as exemplifying the highest level of prophecy. Indeed, the definitions offered there are very close to the mystical view, along the lines of the Hasidic doctrine of *devekuth*. We need not assume that this is necessarily the result of Sufi influence on Maimonides, as suggested by Margaret Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad* (London, 1935), p. 285.

89. This thesis is constantly reiterated in various ways in R. Dov Baer's lectures and in the writings of his disciples, especially those of R. Levi Isaac of Berdichev and Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir.

90. Concerning this conception of nothingness, cf. my study in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 25. [See n. 31.]

91. It is worth noting that this formulation of the ecstatic goal of prayer, which was greatly popularized by Hasidism, derives specifically from a famous halakhic work, R. Jacob ben Asher's *Arba'ah Turim*, *Orah Hayyim*, §98 (and from there to the *Shulhan 'Arukh*, same section).

92. Dov Baer of Mezhirech, *Likkutei Amarim* (Korets, 1781), f. 49a; cf. *Or Torah*, f. 71b.

93. *Likkutei Amarim*, f. 2b; there are parallel versions which include the aggadic phrase from *Ta'anith* 25a, "and the latter miracle is greater than the former one."

94. Nahum of Chernobyl, *Me'or 'Einayim* f. 4b–c. For the hierarchy of letters from *alef* to *tav*, cf. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 7a.

95. Sexual symbolism concerning the *Sefirah* of *Tsaddik* appears with greater intensity in the teachings of the Maggid of Mezhirech, who utilizes them far more than his teacher, the Baal Shem: "A man is called a *Tsaddik* if he is closely tied to God, like an adulterer and his mistress who cannot let go of one another. Thus should be his attachment to the Holy One blessed be He in Torah and prayer, that he cannot let go of Him because of his *devekuth*. And this is alluded to in that one who sanctifies [the sign of] the Covenant [i.e., on his phallus] is known as a *Tsaddik*"—*Or ha-'Emet* (Husiatyn, 1899), p. 49.

96. The Maggid of Mezhirech, in *Likkutei Amarim*, f. 36a.

97. The grandest statements about the originality of the *Tsaddik* appear in R. Elimelech of Lyzhansk, *No'am Elimelekh* (Lemberg, 1788), ff. 61a, 65a.

98. *Berakhoth* 17b, cited several times in the name of the Besht in *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*.

99. *Berakhoth* 35b; cf. the compilation of passages on this subject in *Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov*, Nathan Neta and Shimon M. Wodnik, eds. (Lodz, 1938), I, pp. 272–273.

100. Quoted as the Baal Shem Tov's motto in *Likkutei Amarim*, f. 34b.

101. "That the righteous, before they come to new clarity and a high level, fall down from their level." Quoted in the name of the Besht by R. Moses Elkanah of Zborov, *Berith Avram* (Brody, 1875), f. 22a.

102. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 16b.

103. This formula, which first appears in this sense among the Baal Shem Tov's disciples, originates in the Talmud, *Makkoth* 7b. An important passage regarding this matter is *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, ff. 127–128, without using this specific terminology, which does not appear in any of the hundreds of sayings attributed to the Besht cited in the books of the Rabbi of Polonnoye. There are many passages in which he could have used this phrase had he known it as a saying of the Baal Shem Tov, from which we may conclude the doubtfulness of the attribution to the Besht of the well-known commentary to Psalm 207, which makes use of this formula as something self-evident—a point to which those who attempt to verify this attribution did not pay sufficient heed.

104. This image appears in Hasidic sources in, e.g., R. Gedaliah of Linitz, *Teshu'oth Hen* (Berdichev, 1816), f. 23d. The parable of the spy who penetrates into the enemy camp and must behave accordingly so as not to be discovered is applied by the Maggid to the descent of the *Tsaddik*—cf. *Likkutei Yekarim* (Lemberg, 1864), f. 14a–b; *Or Torah* (Korets, 1804), f. 146b (this first edition is unpaginated).

105. *Tikkunei Zohar*, §69, f. 112a.

106. "And when the multitude of the people ascend one level, the head of the generation also ascends upward. . . . When you have a company and joining together

of with the children of Israel to lift them up that they will return to the good way, you will also receive great good from this and they will take to you olive oil—that they may draw down the flux called oil upon yourself as well”—as seen in *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 64b.

107. Cf. my paper “The Unconscious and the Concept of *Kadmuth ha-Sekhel* in Hasidic Literature” (Heb.). in *Haguth*, Festschrift for the Sixtieth Birthday of Hugo Bermann, (Jerusalem, 1944), pp. 145–152 [reprinted in *Devarim Be-go*, pp. 351–360], as well as Siegmund Hurwitz, “Archetypische Motive in der chassidischen Mystik,” in *Zeitlose Dokumente der Seele* (Studien aus dem C. G. Jung Institut, vol. III [Zürich, 1952]), pp. 121–212.

108. *Or Torah* (Korets, 1804), f. 115b; in the new edition (Jerusalem, 1956), p. 135.

4: SHEKHINAH: THE FEMININE ELEMENT IN DIVINITY

1. See, for example: H. Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom; Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund, 1947); G. Boström, *Proverbia-Studien* (Lund, 1945); O. S. Rankin: *Israel's Wisdom Literature: Its Bearing on Theology and the History of Religion* (Edinburgh, 1936); A. P. Heinisch, *Die persönliche Weisheit des Alten Testaments in religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Münster, 1933)—to mention just a few characteristic titles.

2. *De ebrietate*, §30.

3. R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* (Leipzig, 1904), pp. 41ff.

4. This was already seen, more clearly than by Reitzenstein, in A. F. Gfrörer, *Philo* (Stuttgart, 1831), vol. I, p. 217.

5. *De cherubim*, §49.

6. *De profugis*, §9.

7. Cf. the important paper by B. Dinaburg (Dinur), “Zion and Jerusalem as Forms of Historical Intention in Israel” (Heb.), *Zion*, 16 (1951), pp. 1–17, esp. p. 4.

8. Cf. *Pesikta Rabbati*, §26, ed. Ish-Shalom, ff. 129b–131b, where Jeremiah sees a woman dressed in black, who finally identifies herself, “I am thy mother Zion.” In the Targum to Song of Songs 8:5, we likewise read that “Zion is the mother of Israel.” The antiquity of this usage is indicated by the matter-of-fact way in which Paul uses it: “The heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman; she is our mother” (Gal. 4:26).

9. See esp. Gottfried Arnold, *Das Geheimnis der göttlichen Sophia* (Stuttgart, 1963 [1700]).

10. G. F. Moore, “Intermediaries in Jewish Theology,” *Harvard Theological Review* (1922), p. 41. Identical in substance, although less sharply formulated, is the discussion in his magnum opus *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. I (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), pp. 435–437; vol. III (1930), p. 133.

11. J. Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London, 1912), esp.

pp. 77–149. This valuable monograph suffers from a disturbing proclivity for apologetic interpretations that distort the meaning of numerous quotations. A detailed discussion of the image of the *Shekhinah* in ancient rabbinic literature is now available in the comprehensive study by Arnold Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Shekhinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1969). For valuable material on the features common to the conceptions of the *Shekhinah* and the Holy Ghost, cf. A. Marmorstein, *Studies in Jewish Theology* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 130–131. Concerning the problem of the history of the concept of the *Shekhinah* in talmudic literature, see also W. Oesterly and G.-tH. Box, *The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue*, p. 217; H. H. Schaefer in R. Reitzenstein and Schaefer, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus* (1926), pp. 315–321.

12. *Mekhilta*, ed. Horovitz-Rabin, pp. 51–52. A similar mixture of terms still appears in *Seder Eliyahu Rabba*, ed. Ish-Shalom, pp. 87–88, where “the Holy Praised Be He,” “my Father in Heaven,” and *Shekhinah* are used interchangeably.

13. E.g., *Exodus Rabbah* 2:9.

14. For instance, although less convincingly, Abelson, p. 122.

15. Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature* (Edinburgh, 1936), p. 259.

16. *Lamentations Rabbati*, *Petikhta*, §25, ed. S. Buber, f. 15a.

17. *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:5; BT, *Sanhedrin* 46a–b and *Hagigah* 15b.

18. Cf. Kohut, *‘Arukh ha-Shalem*, vol. VII, p. 90, and J. N. Epstein, *Mavo le-Nusah ha-Mishnah*, vol. I, (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 87. The context of this passage necessitates an utterance by God and by the suffering person; as the *Mishnah* immediately continues: “Thus, the Omnipresent is pained for the blood of the wicked which is spilled.” Rashi’s commentary on this passage indicates that he likewise read this as an utterance of the *Shekhinah*.

19. *Sanhedrin* 39b. The use of the plural form *Shekhinoth* for the various manifestations of God’s attributes appears only in medieval Hebrew literature, in one of the responsa of R. Sherira Gaon: “and Wisdom itself is one of the *Shekhinoth*”—*Teshuvot ha-Ge’onim* (Luck, 1864), §18.

20. In the Targum to Habakkuk 3:4 (cf. the Targum to Isaiah 40:22).

21. In *Sefer Hekhaloth*, edited by H. Odeburg under the title *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (1928; 1973), chap. 7.

22. *Ibid.*, chap. 16.

23. *Alpha Betha de-Rabbi ‘Akiva*, ed. Wertheimer (Jerusalem, 1914), p. 29; on this subject, cf. chap. 1.

24. *Midrash Mishlei*, ed. S. Buber, f. 47a. Perhaps Manuel Joel, *Blicke in die Religionsgeschichte zu Anfang des zweiten christlichen Jahrhunderts* (Breslau, 1880), vol. I, p. 114, had this passage in mind when he attributed to second-century Jewish “Palestinian teachers” (certainly incorrectly and without any documentation) the notion that the *Shekhinah*, as an independent entity alongside God’s justice and goodness, comes and pleads before God.

25. Moses Taku, fragment of the *Kethav Tamim* published in the collection *Otsar*

Nehmad (Vienna, 1860), vol. III, pp. 63 and 67. He sees this midrash as inauthentic or apocryphal.

26. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, II, 24; he suggests there the (unnecessary) correction, *Shekhinah ha-Kedoshah*, instead of *Shekhinah ha-Kodesh*.

27. MS. Warsaw 240.

28. *Pesikta Rabbati*, chap. 31, ed. Ish-Shalom, f. 144b.

29. Saadia Gaon, *Emunot we-Deot*, ed. Slucki, chap. III, p. 63.

30. W. Bacher, *Die Bibelepexese der jüdischen Religionsphilosophen vor Maimuni* (Budapest, 1892), p. 20.

31. *Kommentar zum Buch Jezira*, ed. Halberstam (1885), pp. 16–18. The eleventh-century scholar Rabbi Hananel of Kairouan, distinguishes among different levels of the divine *Kavod* in his Talmud commentary, *Yevamot* 49b: *yesh Kavod le-ma'alah mi-Kavod* (there is glory above glory).

32. *Kuzari*, IV, 3.

33. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I, 64, 76 end.

34. Ed. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1940), p. 27.

35. *Alpha Betha de-Rabbi 'Akiva*, ed. Wertheimer, p. 10: "I withdrew my *Shekhinah*"!

36. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 83.

37. *Midrash ha-Gadol: Sefer Shemot*, ed. M. Margalioth (Jerusalem, 1956), p. 555. The passage is cited by Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961), p. 40. According to *Tosafot* to *Kiddushin* 49a, s.v. *ha-metargem*, one may assume that this is an expansion of R. Hananel's commentary on a talmudic statement, and it is also the unidentified source cited in Judah ben Barzillai's commentary to *Sefer Yetsirah*, p. 22.

38. In the *Fragments of the Targum Yerushalmi* in MS. Paris, published by M. Ginzburger (1898), p. 43.

39. An early fragment (ca. 1260) states that even the first *Sefirah* "must receive from the power" of God, which stands over it and flows into it. Cf. the text I have published in *Mada'ei ha-Yahaduth*, II, (Jerusalem, 1927), p. 227, as the Kabbalah of R. Jacob he-Hasid, son of R. Jacob ha-Cohen of Soria.

40. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 105–106.

41. *Leviticus Rabbah* 27:10, and *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, ed. S. Buber, f. 78a.

42. A similar parable appears in *Midrash Tanhuma, Pikudei*, §4. There the Torah is compared to a princess who dwells in "the innermost of seven chambers," of whom the king says, "Whoever enters to see my daughter is as if he saw me."

43. *Midrash Rabbah* to Song of Songs 3:11.

44. *Bahir*, S §36, M §54. Here, too, this parable is developed from a closely related parable on the relationship of God to the Torah in *Exodus Rabbah* 33:1.

45. Because the verse from Ezekiel 3:12 was introduced into the daily liturgy.

46. Cf. E. Preuschen, *Zwei gnostische Hymnen* (Giessen, 1904). The author was, of course, not acquainted with the parallel Kabbalistic material.

47. Preuschen, text, p. 10, 13, and his note, p. 41: "We have no possibility . . . of interpreting the number thirty-two, as no parallels can be found to it."

48. The second *Sefirah*, according to the explicit enumeration in the *Bahir*, S §96, M §142.

49. *Bava Batra* 16b.

50. In the above-mentioned Talmud passage, we read, in the course of another explanation of the word *ba-kol*: "A precious stone hung from the neck of Father Abraham, and any sick person who looked at it was instantly cured." The *Bahir* passage combines both explanations, seeing them as two allegories for the same subject matter.

51. Cf. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen, 1934), pp. 105–109, on the motif of "being thrown" in Gnosticism; Jonas overlooked this amazing passage, which I myself did not properly understand in my 1923 German edition of the *Bahir*, p. 61.

52. As presented in the *Bahir*, S §131; M §190. While in the *Bahir* Jacob sought this precious stone for himself, the *Zohar* develops this Gnostic image, leaving it to David, the first messianic figure, to seek for himself the cornerstone the builders had rejected.

53. From an admittedly bad manuscript edited in an unfortunately unsuccessful work by M. Grajwer, *Die Kabbalistischen Lehren des Moses ben Nachman in seinem Kommentar zum Pentateuch* (Breslau, 1933), p. 63.

54. The corrupt text ought to be corrected thus (*nun* is an abbreviation for *nekevah*).

55. Cf. Nahmanides' commentary on *Exodus* 14:19.

56. This etymology of *Kenesseth Yisra'el* is not yet found in the *Bahir*, which does however contain, albeit in especially peculiar form, the idea that the prince's bride gathers all the riches from her father's house and "hides it away perpetually and mixes everything" (S §104; M §156).

57. "Zion" is interpreted here in the sense of "representation, display"; hence the Hebrew, *tsiyun kol ha-kohot*.

58. This precise translation is not affected by the fact that the word *Shekhinah* is employed without any article in the original text. Such a usage is already widespread in the Talmud, because the personification gave the concept something of the quality of a proper name, which does not require an article in the Hebrew.

59. *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshith*, in the collection *Batei Midrashoth*, ed. Wertheimer (Jerusalem, 1950), I, p. 30; *Midrash Kohen*, in A. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, II, p. 33. My German translation and notes on *Bahir*, p. 124, ought to be corrected in light of these sources.

60. The same conception and symbolism already lie behind the *Bahir*, S §20; M §29, in which the two letters *heh* in the Divine Name *YHVH* are known as "the upper *heh*" and "the lower *heh*" (rather than simply as the first and the second *heh*).

61. Such loose usage of the term *Shekhinah* is later based on the *Bahir*, S §116; M §171. Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, XV, 4, written in 1548, says: "All of [the

Realm of] Emanation (²*Atsiluth*) and every manifestation of the King of the World can be called *Shekhinah*.”

62. The tractate *Sidrei de-Shimusha Rabbah*, in which they occur, was not composed in the Geonic era, i.e., prior to the year 1100 (as I had previously assumed, following in Jellinek's footsteps), but in the early thirteenth century. Cf. my paper on this topic, in *Tarbits*, 16 (1945), 196–209.

63. This image, insofar as I can tell, comes from Ashkenazic Hasidism, ca. 1200, and was taken up with enthusiasm by the *Zohar*; cf. II, 118a; III, 17a, 231b, 239b; and *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* to Ruth, *Zohar Hadash* 83d. Cf. also my book *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, p. 222. On the source of the term *Malkhuth*, see my *Ursprung und Anfänge*, pp. 163–164, 197.

64. The term “King” (*Melekh*) is used in the *Zohar* as an appellative for the third and sixth *Sefiroth*. In the former case the term is often pinpointed as *Malka 'Ila'ah* (“Supernal King”); cf. *Zohar*, II, 67b, etc. The lower *Shekhinah* is also designated as “king,” albeit in very few passages and in pallid form: i.e., *setam melekh* (“simply king”) or *Malka Tata'ah* (“lower king”). Cf. *Zohar*, I, 29a, 30a, 199b.

65. See on this my book *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 74–78. The meaning of this term fluctuates greatly in Kabbalistic usage; almost every one of the more important lists of appellatives of the *Sefiroth* from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries places this term in a different position. Cf. my book *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, pp. 184–188; *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 209–214. The designation of *Binah* as *Yotser Bereshith* was already known to R. Abraham ben David of Posquieres (the Rabad).

66. Both theses have been advanced during different stages of the history of the Kabbalah.

67. *Gikatilla*, *Sha'arei Orah*, §8.

68. *Ibid.* (Offenbach, 1715), f. 9a–b (Dorot ed., pp. 65–66).

69. *Midrash Rabbah* to Song of Songs 5:1; the author's subsequent discussion is built upon this.

70. *Genesis Rabbah* 47:8; cf. Theodor, pp. 475, 793, 983).

71. *Sefer ha-Yihud ha-Amiti*, MS. Florence—Laurentiania, plut. II, cod. 15. On this work, which belongs to the genre of *Sefer ha-'Iyyun*, *Ma'ayan ha-Hokhmah*, and their like see my *Kitvei-Yad ba-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1930), p. 14. The contents and terminology of this work contradict its attribution, found in some manuscripts, to R. Eleazar of Worms.

72. Cf. his *'Avodath ha-Kodesh*, IV, 11.

73. *Tikkunei Zohar*, §22, f. 65a. A similar parable concerning the king himself, not the *Shekhinah*, appears in *Sha'arei Orah*, sec. V, f. 49b (Dorot ed., p. 205).

74. Thus, for example, in R. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, MS. Munich 17, f. 36a.

75. Cf. the long, often misunderstood, discussion in Nahmanides' Torah commentary on Genesis 46:4.

76. Abelson, op. cit., p. 159. On p. 152, Abelson argues that it is not clear what

specific Kabbalistic meaning Nahmanides attaches to the *memra*. He is, however, mistaken; Nahmanides uses very precise, albeit esoteric, terminology, and clearly identifies *memra* and *Shekhinah* with one another by viewing the latter as the tenth *Sefirah*.

77. *Zohar*, III, 180a: “‘Put off thy shoes from on thy feet’ [Ex. 3:5] . . . We learn that he commanded Moses to separate from his [earthly] wife and to unite with another woman, the holy, heavenly woman of light, who is the *Shekhinah*.”

78. *Zohar*, I, 228b; cf. also II, 101a and III, 124a.

79. *Sha'arei Orah*, f. 59b (Dorot ed., p. 230).

80. A. E. Waite's detailed analysis in *The Secret Doctrine in Israel* (London, 1913), pp. 190–269, would be invaluable were it not seriously impaired by the fact that the author, who could not read the original Aramaic text and followed Jean de Pauly's often utterly fantastic French translation, especially in the most difficult passages, read many things into the *Zohar* that are simply not there. This invalidates the book for laymen, who cannot verify his statements in every case.

81. On this commentary, see the detailed monograph of G. Vajda, *Le Commentaire d'Ezra de Gérone sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris, 1969).

82. Thus, for example, the interpretation of Psalm 48 in *Zohar*, III, 5a–b; of Psalm 52, in III, 21a. The latter psalm is interpreted throughout, with an only faintly concealed symbolism, as referring to the formation of sperm in man.

83. “To the performance of the service of love with him”—that is to say, by loving the *Shekhinah*, they perform the true service of God (the word *pulhana*, “service,” never has an erotic connotation in the *Zohar*). This passage was later cited by the antinomian Sabbatians to justify their orgiastic rites of wife-swapping and ritual copulation, as though the text read, “to perform the *cult* of love before him.”

84. *Zohar*, III, 296a–b (*Idra Zutta*). While here Zion constitutes the *Shekhinah* in its sacred function, the author of the *Tikunei Zohar*, writing somewhat later, uses corresponding symbolism on the demonic side. If the *Shekhinah* comes under the power of the Other Side, because of the sins of Israel, then Lilith rather than the *Shekhinah* receives the seed of life. In these terms one may speak of the “nakedness of the *Shekhinah*” in Exile (*ervah de-Shekhinta*), which is Lilith herself—the demonic counterpart of the *Shekhinah*, and the spirit of fornication, which establishes itself instead of the creative receiving of blessing. The passage in question is in the main portion of the *Zohar*, I, 27a, but, like the entire sequence of pages around it (I, 22b–29a), it doubtless comes from the *Tikkunei Zohar*.

85. Cf., for instance, the detailed discussion in R. Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim*, VIII, 18–23.

86. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 137–146.

87. This is gleaned from the exegesis of Psalm 87:5, which is interpreted to mean “It is said of Zion that male and female are born there.”

88. *Pardes Rimmonim* XV, 4, f. 91c.

89. In this important chapter of his magnum opus, Cordovero develops his profound conception of the Sefirotic world as a medium of infinite reflection, both in

whose totality, and in every individual monad or *Sefirah*, the light of all the *Sefirot* is endlessly reflected. Not only is the light reflected in the *Shekhinah*, as the last *Sefirah*, radiated back to the highest *Sefirah*, but this reflected light (or *hozer*) in turn becomes again direct light by reflecting onto the first *Sefirah*. There thus takes place an infinite process of reflection, in which is determined (in contrast to the *Zohar*'s view) the dialectical life of the creative Godhead. This is the dialectics formulated in the phrase "Its end is anchored in its beginning and its beginning is anchored in its end," as Cordovero quotes *Sefer Yetzirah* I, 5. Here not only the last *Sefirah* but every *Sefirah* is defined as a mirror or, more precisely, as a medium reflecting the divine light: "For just as there is the illumination of the return of the light from *Malkhuth*, so is the light reflected from *Yesod*, and from *Hod*, and from all of them. And just as there is direct light from *Kether*, so is there from *Hokhmah*, and from *Binah*, and from *Hesed*. For every *Sefirah* . . . is a mirror, which the supernal light strikes and from whence the light is reflected, until in this manner the light ascends directly and is infinitely reflected" (*Pardes Rimmonim*, XV, 2).

90. See, e.g., R. Israel Yaffe, *Or Yisra'el* (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1702), f. 39b.

91. This is best defined by Hayyim Vital, *'Eis Hayyim*, chap. 42, §1. This entire section of this basic work of Lurianic Kabbalah focuses on the problem of "male and female waters." These originate, according to traditional views, in the physiology of intercourse between man and wife. Incidentally, misleading in this crucial point is Knorr von Rosenroth's definition, in his lexicon of Kabbalistic *loci communes*, *Kabbala denudata* (1677), vol. 1, p. 543: "quo termino denotatur semen seu principium foemininum vel passivum circa generationem seu productionem alicujus rei." This definition is inappropriate to the active force of the female, with which we are concerned here.

92. I discuss this point above, chap. 2.

93. This idea is not new, but appears in essence in an interesting passage in *Sefer ha-Bahir*: "What is meant by the verse: 'And I also will chastise you seven times for your sins' [Lev. 26:28]? The Holy One, blessed be He, says, 'I will chastise you,' and *Kenesseth Yisra'el* [i.e., the *Shekhinah*] says, 'Do not imagine that I seek mercy for you, but I will also chastise you. It is not enough that I will judge the judgment, but I will also chastise you.' What is the meaning of 'seven times for your sins'? The Community of Israel says, 'I also will chastise you'; and it is answered by those [seven *Sefirot*] of which is written, 'Seven [times] a day I praise thee' [Ps. 119:164]. They join it and say: 'We seven, even though among us is one [*Sefirah*] that is in charge of merit and goodness, will also be transformed and will chastise you. And why? For your sins. But if you return, then I will return to you . . . and we will all ask mercy from the king.' " [S §45; M §66–67]

94. *Zohar*, III, 74a. The idea that the *Shekhinah* is now captive with the Other Side is clearly stated in, e.g., *Zohar*, I, 12b.

95. The image of the "Tree of Death" was not coined by the *Zohar*, but is found in a late midrash concerning Adam's sin. Cf. *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, ed. Ish-Shalom, p. 23.

96. Cf., e.g., *Zohar*, I, 154b.

97. It was primarily Boström (op. cit., n. 1) who tried to justify this thesis.

98. A detailed description of the demonic figure of the "whorish woman" as an antagonistic negative counterpart to the *Shekhinah* is found in *Zohar*, I, 148a.

99. *Zohar*, I, 35b, 221b; II, 48b. This motif is already known in relation to the "Small Sophia" in the Gnostic writings of Nag Hammadi, in the apocryphal Gospel According to Philip, §39, but the translators did not realize its biblical source in Proverbs!

100. This Zoharic formula (see III, 83a, 109b) is first cited in the name of R. Moses Cordovero by his disciple, R. Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah* (written 1575), Munkacz ed., f. 198b (*Sha'ar ha-Kedushah*, chap. 16).

101. See "Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 138ff.

102. The earliest text of his account was published in 1940 by S. Assaf from a previously unpublished letter; see *Kobets 'al Yad*, n.s. 3 (13) (1939), p. 123. Later variants appear in Naftali Bacharach, *'Emek ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1643), f. 109c, and in the anonymous *Hemdut Yamim* (Venice, 1763), vol. II, f. 4a.

103. The meaning here is not that she was undressed, but that she was wearing black garments of mourning. The author of *'Emek ha-Melekh* writes (following the *Petikta* to *Lamentations Rabbati*): "He saw her as the Prophet Jeremiah saw her when she left the Holy of Holies, with her hair disheveled." R. Abraham Halevi was generally considered (in *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*) to be a reincarnation of the Prophet Jeremiah. Cf. above, n. 8.

104. H. Zeitlin, *Ketavim Nivharim* (Warsaw, 1912), pt. II, p. 112 [reprinted in his *'Al gevul shenei 'Olamoth* (Tel Aviv, 1965), p. 123—Ed.]. This otherwise rather weak and sentimental essay, "Shekhinah," deserves credit for being the first treatment of the theme; when it first appeared, it made an impression (and not only on myself) for its original insight into the understanding of Kabbalistic symbols.

105. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York, 1946).

106. See my article "The Unconscious and the Concept of *Kadmuth ha-Sekhel* in Hasidic Literature" (Heb.), in *Devarim Be-go*, 351–360.

107. John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta; Essays on the Shakta Tantrashastra* (Madras, 1920); Zimmer, op. cit.

108. Zimmer, p. 139.

5: GILGUL: THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

1. See A. Schmiedl, *Studien über jüdische Religionsphilosophie* (Vienna, 1869), pp. 157–166.

2. Walter Stettner, *Die Seelenwanderung bei Griechen und Römern* (Stuttgart, 1934).

3. This problem has been particularly closely examined by A. V. Williams Jackson, "The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Manichaeism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 45 (1925), pp. 246–268.

4. Cf. Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922), p. 58.

5. R. Saadiah Gaon, *Emunot ve-De'ot*, VI, 7. Cf. M. Schreiner, *Der Kalām in der jüdischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1895), pp. 62–67, on the history of the doctrine of transmigration.

6. Al-Baghdadi, *Moslem Schisms and Sects*, pt. II, trans. A. Halkin (New York, 1935), p. 92. On the controversy surrounding this doctrine in Syria and Iraq in the thirteenth century, cf. R. Strothman, "Seelenwanderung bei den Nusairi," *Oriens*, 12 (1959), pp. 89–103.

7. The subject was first fully discussed in S. Poznanski, "Aus Qirqisani's Kitab al-anwar," *Semitic Studies in Memory of Dr. Alexander Kohut* (Berlin, 1897), pp. 435–453. Leon Nemoy has since published a complete edition of *Sefer ha-Oroth*.

8. Hans Söderberg, *La Religion des Cathares* (Uppsala, 1949), pp. 152–154; Arno Borst, *Die Katharer* (1953), pp. 168–171. The relationship of these problems to the Kabbalah of southern France was beyond these authors' ken.

9. I have made several corrections here to my translation, which originally appeared in 1923.

10. Cf. my *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, pp. 94–109. [English: *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 106–123.]

11. *Hagigah* 13b–14a.

12. *Shabbat* 152b offers the following interpretation of Ecclesiastes 12:7 (referred to at the end of the above-quoted *Bahir* passages): "Our rabbis taught: 'And the spirit returneth unto God, who gave it.' Return it to Him as He gave it to you; as He gave it to you in purity, return it to Him in purity. This may be compared to a human king, who distributed royal garments to his servants. Those who were wise folded them up and placed them in the chest, while the foolish ones went about in them while doing their work. In time, the king asked for his garments; the wise ones returned them clean, but the foolish ones returned them soiled. The king was happy to receive the wise ones, but was angry with the foolish ones. The wise ones were told to bring the garments to the storehouse, and were allowed to go home into peace, but the foolish ones were told to bring the garments to the washerman, and they were put in prison. Thus does the Holy One, blessed be He; concerning the bodies of the righteous, He says: 'He entereth into peace, they rest in their beds' [Isa. 57:2], and of their souls it is written: 'The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life' [1 Sam. 25:29]. But with regard to the bodies of the wicked, he says, 'There is no peace, saith the Lord, for the wicked' [Isa. 48:22]."

13. Even Pseudo-Bahya's Arabic work on the soul, with its strongly Neoplatonic coloration, refers to the soul as a "beautiful garment," albeit in reference to the talmudic passage quoted above—*Kitab M'ani al-Nafis*, ed. Goldziher (Berlin, 1907), pp. 64–65. Robert Eisler, *Orphisch-dionysische Mysteriengedanken in der christlichen Antike* (Leip-

zig, 1925), p. 355, interprets the *Bahir* passage in terms of the standard symbolism (the body as the garment in which the soul is clothed); however, this can be refuted by the *Bahir*'s approach to this talmudic source. No less problematical are the other quotations cited there (p. 354) from Josephus's *Jewish War*, II, 8, 14, and III, 5, 8, as well as from Pseudo-Philo's *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, as if there existed among the Pharisees a doctrine of a "plurality of rebirths of the souls of the righteous, one after another." I have not discussed this claim here, as I can find no support for this in the sources cited by Eisler.

14. I now believe this to be the correct interpretation of this passage, as opposed to my earlier German book (p. 112), in which I interpreted the ingathering of the souls as occurring at the time of death. The ancient Gnostic symbolism of the "gathering of the seed," which appears in antinomian contexts, is known from St. Epiphanius's accounts in *Panarion*, and is discussed in detail by L. Fendt, *Gnostische Mysterien* (1922), pp. 5ff.

15. The symbols appearing in the *Bahir*, S §§104, 123, and 126 (M §§155–56, 180, and 184), are identical in essence, although not in all details, and are quite sufficiently clear.

16. The author of this passage may be referring to a specific number of souls that were created, and that are to enter into the bodies of human beings in the future.

17. Recanati, *Perush ha-Torah* (Venice, 1545), f. 70a, 209a.

18. Nahmanides, *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* (Ferrara, 1556), f. 9a–b.

19. The expression is based upon a wordplay on the talmudic *Sod ha-ʿIbbur*, connected with the astronomical calculations involved in the intercalation (lit., "impregnation") of an extra month into the lunar year, to square it with the solar year. The Kabbalists used this term in the sense of a "passage" of the soul from one body to another. However, it may have involved other nuances as well; hence, the mystical illumination of the pious by influx from above is also called "impregnation."

20. Those key verses that repeatedly recurred in early Kabbalistic literature were primarily—apart from those occasionally mentioned in the *Bahir*—Exodus 34:7; Deuteronomy 3:26, 33:6 (on the basis of the Targum); II Samuel 14:14; numerous verses in Job 33; Ecclesiastes 1:9, 4:2, 8:10, 14. Cf. also the compilation in Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona's *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* (ca. 1240), published in *Otsar Nehmad*, 3 (1860), p. 162.

21. This is already so in the writings of the school of Gerona, especially in those of R. Ezra ben Solomon and Nahmanides (in his *Torah Commentary* and in other works). Likewise, the *She'eloth be-ʿinyan tsaddik ve-ra' lo* by R. Sheshet de Marcadil, one of Nahmanides' disciples, speaks of transmigration only as *sod ha-ʿibbur* or simply as *mid-dah*, while the term *hitgalgel* is already mentioned among the phrases used by R. Isaac of Acre. See *Tarbits*, 16 (1945), pp. 143–150.

22. *Zohar*, II, 95a–109, in a lengthy sermon delivered by an old man before some of the circle, known among the Kabbalists as *Sabba de-Mishpatim*.

23. I have discussed the genesis and early history of this Hebrew term for transmigration in my article in *Tarbits*, 16 (1945), pp. 135–139. This Hebrew term, with

its midrashic associations, was used instead of *ha'atakath neshamoth*, customary among the translators from the Arabic, the sense being one of movement from one place to another. G. Vajda has noted a parallel Arabic term among the Ismailiites in *Revue d'Histoire des Religions*, 107 (1955), pp. 91–92. Corresponding precisely to the Hebrew *hitgalgel*, but employed long before either the Hebrew or Arabic sources, St. Augustine used the Latin *revolvi*, in his account of the belief in transmigration among the Manicheans. Cf. two citations in Söderberg, *La Religion des Cathares*, p. 153: the souls of the pious *auditores* (the lowest caste among the Manicheans) do not ascend directly to heaven after their deaths; instead, “they transmigrate into the *electi*, chosen ones, according to their faith”—that is, into the bodies of the highest caste (*animas auditorum in electos revolvi arbitrantur*). See now also the Manichean sources (in Greek) for this term (μεταγγιζομός) in A. Adams, *Texte zum Manichäismus* (Berlin, 1954), p. 57.

24. This conclusion follows from a careful reading of various passages on this subject. *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* to Ruth—*Zohar Hadash* (1885), f. 89a—is very explicit in restricting transmigration to the childless alone. [The text expressly states that this expiation does not occur for other transgressions.] Only in a very few places does it mention *gilgul* outside of the context of childlessness and reproduction: e.g., *Zohar*, I, 239a; III, 88b, 182b. The parable in the *Bahir*, S §135; M §195, is applied by the *Zohar* to those who are childless, and to them alone: cf. *Zohar*, I, 186b–188a; II, 91b; III, 177a. To be sure, II, 91b could be applied more generally to other sins, and not necessarily to those specified.

25. Cf. *Zohar*, III, 7a.

26. The anonymous, comprehensive work on *Ta'amei ha-Mitsvot* is the source for the numerous relevant quotations brought by R. Menahem Recanati in his *Perush ha-Torah* (Basel, 1580) in the name of “the recent Kabbalists” (i.e., from the late thirteenth century on). This work reappeared in plagiarized form around 1520, when it was published with the same title under the name R. Isaac ibn Farhi; it was recopied in his name in many manuscripts. In certain cases the author applies *gilgul* to other transgressions, such as singing together with women, going to bars, or cutting off the corners of the hair on one's head—the latter runs the risk of spending his next reincarnation as a Catholic priest with a tonsure.

27. See n. 21 above (and my paper in *Tarbits* mentioned there).

28. Cf., for example, the passage on the sparks (cited in sec. III of this chapter), and the remarks of R. Sheshet (*Tarbits*, 16, p. 150): “And the soul of the *benoni* shall migrate; and at times the soul of the *Tsaddik*, even though he performed good deeds his entire life, will migrate if he performed a serious transgression that outweighs all the good deeds he did.”

29. *Tikkunei Zohar*, §69, f. 99b; *Ra'aya Mehemna* (*Zohar*, III, 216a), speaks of Moses passing through many *gilgulim* in order to assist Israel in its exile. A spark of Moses' soul is present in the soul of every Torah scholar in every generation—a saying that had enormous influence.

30. We first find this in R. Isaac of Acre, in an important fragment found in MS. Florence—Bibl. Laurentiana, Plut. 44; Cod. 14, f. 136b, where it appears as an oral tradition that he heard.

31. A more appropriate biblical source to support this doctrine could scarcely be found.

32. See, for example, *Zohar*, III, 216b (*Ra'aya Mehemna*).

33. R. Bahya ben Asher, *Perush la-Torah* (on Deut. 33:6) (Venice, 1544), f. 240b; cf. the responsa of Joseph Alcastiel (1482), which I published in "On the Knowledge of Kabbalah in Spain on the Eve of the Expulsion" (Heb.), *Tarbits*, 24 (1955), p. 194. In *Likkutei Masoreth* (ca. 1300), we read: "There is a certain place between Gan Eden and Gehinnom called 'the Vale of Weeping' (*Emek ha-Bakha*), where those souls that need to return to the world an additional time dwell"—MS. Cod. Parma de Rossi 1230, f. 114a. The Safed Kabbalists also knew of "transgressions for which, even after he enters into Gehinnom, he must return in transmigration," because of the great corruption that has overwhelmed him that must be purged in Gehinnom. See, for example, the *Collectanea* of R. Moses Yonah written in Safed in 1586, MS. Schocken 97, f. 79a.

34. The exact opposite of this doctrine is presented by R. David ibn Abi Zimra in his *Migdal David* (1560): the righteous transmigrate only three times, the wicked as often as a thousand times—*Magen David* (Lemberg, 1883), f. 30a.

35. "When Abel offered a sacrifice, he gazed at the *Shekhinah*, [seeing] more than he could comprehend, and thereby forfeited his life"—Bahya ben Asher, *Perush ha-Torah* (on Exod. 3:6), f. 69a. We find similar ideas in R. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Einayim*, Cod. Munich, Hebr. 17, f. 19a. A much sharper statement on Abel's spiritual sin appears in Pseudo-Yehushiel's article (ca. 1250) (which I published in *Tarbits*, 4 [1933], p. 69), which states: "Cain and Abel were 'uprooting the plants.'"

36. R. Bahya ben Asher, *Perush ha-Torah*.

37. These circumstances are described in greatest detail in *Tikkunei Zohar*, §69, and in R. Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat 'Eynayim*.

38. R. Moses de Leon, *Sod 'Inyan Pesah*, MS. Schocken, Kabbal. 14, f. 86b; *Sefer ha-Peli'ah* (Korets, 1784), f. 101d.

39. R. Moses de Leon, op. cit., and very frequently since him. The statement that Job was born of a levirate marriage—i.e., was himself a reincarnate—first occurs in *Ra'aya Mehemna*, III, 216b, and in a contemporaneous collection from the school of the Rashba (R. Solomon ben Adret) in MS. Halbertstam 174, f. 19a (now in Jews' College, London).

40. H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen, 1949), pp. 98–116; to be sure, his citations of parallels to rabbinic and Kabbalistic sources must be used with caution and critical acumen.

41. R. Moses de Leon, op. cit., f. 86a; Recanati mentions this in two passages in his *Torah Commentary*—in one place (f. 13a) he cites an acronym as a mnemonic for a certain *Zohar* quotation (I, 34b), but not as part of it. Despite many "citations" of this

idea from the *Zohar*, it does not in fact appear there, not even in the *Tikkunim*. Perhaps the source of this error lies in Recanati's interpretation of that passage.

42. Thus, in Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi (Pseudo-Rabad, ca. 1300), in MS. Paris 842, f. 37b; and in the response of R. Joseph Alcastiel—*Tarbits*, 24, p. 176.

43. Cf. *Sefer Peli'ah* (ca. 1350–1400), ed. Korets, 1784, f. 42a–b. The question of the date of composition of *Sefer ha-Peli'ah* has recently been reopened in an article by B. Netanyahu, "Establishing the Dates of Composition of the Books *Ha-Kaneh* and *Ha-Peli'ah*" (Heb.), *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume* (Heb. Sec.) (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 247–267; the matter requires further examination.

44. "On the Doctrine of Reincarnation in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah" (Heb.), *Tarbits*, 16, p. 138 (cited in the name of R. Joseph ben Samuel, from the circle of Gerona Kabbalists, ca. 1220). Cf. *Zohar*, I, 131a; II, 100a; III, 309a (although the term "sparks" does not appear there); Joseph Alcastiel's Kabbalistic Responsa, §12, *Tarbits*, 24, p. 195 (which speaks of branches rather than of sparks); David ibn Abi Zimra, *Migdal David*, f. 45a.

45. *Tarbits*, 16, p. 143. A nearly identical approach appears later in Hayyim Vital, *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 5.

46. First in a collection from the circle of disciples of Rashba, MS. Parma—de Rossi 1221, f. 288b: "The righteous man knoweth the soul of his beast' [Prov. 12:10]: the souls of the animals are sparks of human souls." A similar idea is presented by the anonymous author of *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitsvoth* (see in the text) with regard to the same verse: "Two people will undergo transmigration in beasts [in a dam and its offspring] . . . for there are sparks of intelligence in the beast"—ibid., *Negative Commandments*, §16. The *Zohar*, I, 20b, already finds a link between human and animal souls: "The attributes that are below, which were smelted in the smelting of the spirit [of man], there were portrayed from them images that were embodied in another embodiment, such as the portrayal of the pure animals . . . only they needed to be included in human form." The notion of soul sparks came to the sixteenth-century Kabbalists primarily by way of that same anonymous *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitsvoth*, circulated in Salonica around 1520 by R. Isaac ibn-Farhi. By 1536 Joseph Karo was well acquainted with this doctrine; cf. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (London, 1962), pp. 112–113.

47. The terminology is precise only in those passages that speak about the division into three "souls" and the function of each portion; when the soul per se is discussed, all three terms are used without distinction.

48. *Tikkunei Zohar*, §70, ff. 125b–126a, 138a, where three types of voice are distinguished according to the three notes in the shofar—*teki'ah*, *shevarim*, *teru'ah*.

49. The same is true of rebirth resulting from levirate marriage; cf. the end of *Tikkunei Zohar*, §26.

50. All this esp. at the end of *Tikkunei Zohar*, §70, ff. 134b–135a.

51. Ibid., §70, f. 132a. On the connection between the "shape of the King" and the 613 commandments, see there, f. 131a.

52. *Tikkunei Zohar*, §69 contains the most detailed description of this process. However, important material concerning this matter can also be found in §26 and in the *Tikkunim* printed in *Zohar Ḥadash*. “There is no *Sefirah* that the heavenly man (*Adam ḥla’ah*), who forms the letters of the Divine Name *Yod Heh Vav Heh*, does not pass through in *gilgul*.” Here the *gilgul* is the process of emanation itself!—*ibid.*, §69, f. 102b; see esp. ff. 109b–110b there.

53. Only one passage (*ibid.*, §70, ff. 132b–133a) describes the souls of the wicked as “sparks” (*nitsotsin*) thrown into the drops of semen.

54. See, e.g., *ibid.*, §69, ff. 99b, 102b. The frequent and protracted discussions of Moses’ *gilgulim*, linked to the doctrine of *‘ibbur*, are also related to this matter. Something of Moses’ soul spreads through every generation and is present in every scholar who studies Torah unselfishly. Cordovero vehemently disputed this teaching in an allegorical reinterpretation of the *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* passages: “Heaven forbid that Moses our teacher, the choicest of all creations, should be reincarnated at all . . . but the intention concerns the presence of the light of his Torah, which shines upon the master of Torah”—*Pardes Rimmonim*, VIII, 22, f. 65b. However, this view was not accepted.

55. *Tikkunei Zohar*, §70, f. 133a. This idea already occurs in R. Ezra of Gerona’s *Perush ha-Aggadoth* (on *Kiddushin*), printed in *Likkutei Shikheḥah u-Pe’ah* (Ferrara, 1556), f. 14b, as well as in the above-mentioned *Ta’amei ha-Mitsvoth*, MS. Cambridge, f. 15b.

56. The influx of the stream of emanation into the *Sefiroth* is likewise designated as *Sod ha-‘ibbur*; it harmonizes the mystical “sun” and “moon,” and the waning of the “moon” is filled out and “impregnated” by the light of *Tif’ereth*; see R. Menahem Ziyroni, *‘Al ha-Torah* (Lemberg, 1882), *Pinḥas*, f. 67a.

57. Cf. *Zohar*, II, 104a–b, and III, 217a. The main body of the *Zohar* has no specific term for this process, while *Ra’aya Mehemna* (III, 216a) and *Tikkunei Zohar* (§69, f. 99a) already employ *‘ibbur* in this precise sense. An important parallel to the *Zohar* passage on Nadab and Abihu appears in R. Isaac of Acre’s addenda to *Me’irat ‘Einayim*, appearing only in MS. Leiden—Hebr. 93, f. 155b: “He said that he had heard that the souls of Nadab and Abihu are the souls of Phineas, for because they had not married or had children their souls were not quite perfect, so they both entered Pinchas. For before a man procreates children, his soul is in a state of potentia, and it does not become actual until he has procreated a son or daughter; but so long as he does not procreate, he is not perfect and cannot leave transmigration.” Sixteenth-century Kabbalists also explained the specific relationship of master to disciple in terms of soul impregnation. See, e.g., the *Teshuvot* of R. David ibn Abi Zimra, §472, and R. Moses Cordovero’s *Commentary to the Zohar*, I, 192a (cited in Abraham Azulai’s *Or ha-Ḥamah*). The difference between *gilgul* and *‘ibbur* is defined by Isaac of Acre, in MS. Munich 17, f. 139b, as follows: “The secret of impregnation alludes to the Land of the Living, while transmigration alludes to the Land of the Dead; the secret of *‘ibbur* is the secret of the soul, while the secret of *gilgul* is the secret of the body (into which the soul enters at birth).”

58. Moses Cordovero, *Shmu'ah me-'inyan ha-Gilgul*, published in *Sefer Hekhal ha-Shem* (Venice, 1601), f. 37a, as well as in "Inquiries Concerning the Matter of the Angels" (Heb.), in R. Margalioth, *Malakhei 'Elyon* (Jerusalem, 1945), pp. 64–65.

59. R. Hayyim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* (Jerusalem, 1912), f. 22a.

60. Cf. my article "Dibbuk" (Heb.) in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), vol. VI, 19–21. The term first occurs in a Yiddish text from Volyhnia, ca. 1680.

61. R. David ibn Abi Zimra, *Metsudath David* (Zolkiew, 1862), f. 27d, where he presents a long and valuable discussion of the doctrine of transmigration (ff. 27c–30d).

62. *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitsvoth*, ascribed to R. Isaac ibn Farhi, MS. Jerusalem 8°597, f. 201b (Negative Comandments, §62). MS. Jerusalem was prepared in 1529 for R. Shlomo Alkabez.

63. MS. Paris 842, f. 42b.

64. R. Moses Cordovero, *Shi'ur Komah* (1883), f. 82a; and in Solomon Alkabez, *Shores Yishai* (1891), f. 79b: "You know that the souls are in the image of a family."

65. The indignation with which Reuchlin, in the second book of his *De arte cabalistica*, speaks about this doctrine, which he ascribes to Pythagoras, proves that he was ignorant of the fact that it was likewise advocated in Kabbalah.

66. *De occulta philosophia*, III, §41.

67. See R. Judah Hayyat, *Commentary to Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Ferrara, 1558), f. 204b.

68. In my article in *Tarbits*, 16, p. 136, as well as in my article "Kabbala" in the German-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, IX (1932), col. 707, I advocated the view that R. Ezra or R. Azriel of Gerona allude to this doctrine; I must now correct my earlier opinion. The passage on which I relied, from R. Azriel's *Commentary on the Liturgy* (*Perush ha-Tefilloth*), MS. Parma—Stern 46, f. 78a, is corrupt. The correct text is in MS. Cambridge—Dd. 4.2 [2], f. 10b, reading *nefesh behamit* rather than *'onesh behamit* (and in no way hinting at such a doctrine). The passage from *Sefer ha-Temunah* (whose date is unclear), whose author knew both the doctrine and the term *gilgul*, is obscure. The oldest commentary to this book attributes to him, perhaps correctly, the view that there is *gilgul* in the form of animals as well. This may suggest a later date than I had originally thought.

69. Cf. Menahem Recanati, R. Meir abu Sahula (at the end of his *Commentary on the Bahir*, published anonymously in Vilna, 1883), *Sefer ha-Peli'ah* (especially ed. Korets, 1784, f. 21d), and R. Isaac of Acre. Around 1425 R. Joseph Albo polemicized against this doctrine as one advocated by the Kabbalists; cf. *Sefer ha-'Ikkarim*, IV, 29.

70. *Ta'amei ha-Mitsvoth*, f. 49. R. David ibn Abi Zimra relies upon the same verse in the name of the *Zohar*: "and I remember that I saw in the *Zohar* . . .," which may be due to a lapse of memory on his part, whereby he confused one source with another. Cf. *Metsudath David* (1862), f. 28b (§11). On the connection between sacrifices and transmigration, cf. *ibid.*, f. 51d.

71. R. David ibn Abi Zimra, *Migdal David*, f. 30c, cites an anonymous source according to which such a soul may even transmigrate as a worm. But between each

incarnation as an animal, he is again reincarnated as a human being in order to have a renewed chance to perform *tikkun*. If he fails in this opportunity, he sinks down into a lower level of animal life.

72. G. Scholem, *Einige kabbalistische Handschriften im Britischen Museum* [Voradbruck aus Soncino-Blätter, Bd. 4 (Jerusalem, 1932)], pp. 28–29; G. R. S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (London, 1931), p. 232, likewise offers such an interpretation of Irenaeus's work on the doctrine of the Gnostic Karpokrates, *Adv. Heres*, I, 25, 4. I strongly doubt that his interpretation is correct.

73. *Zohar*, II, 94b (this passage, although printed in the main part of the *Zohar* text, belongs to the literature of the *Tikkunim*), and many other places in *Tikkunei Zohar*. *Tikkun*, §70, f. 132a, states a tradition "that there is a soul that is embodied in a dog. Hence David prayed, 'Deliver my soul from the sword, mine only one (*yehidati*) from the power of the dog' [Ps. 22:21]." The author interprets the dog as a symbol of the devil, Samael.

74. A. Coomaraswamy, "On the One and Only Transmigrant," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1937), p. 64 (printed as a special supplement).

75. Rabbi Joseph's commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah* (published under the name of R. Abraham ben David, the Rabad), may have been the ultimate source to which Henry More refers in his presentation of the essential doctrines of the Kabbalists in his *Cabala Aëto-Paëdo-Melissaea* (The Kabbalah of the Eagle, the Youth, and the Bee), in his *Kabbala denudata*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Sulzbach, 1677), p. 294: "Every spirit found in a bit of gravel is liable to be transformed into a plant, and from the plant into an animal, from the animal to a human being, and from the human being to an angel, and from the angel to God Himself, who creates the new heaven and earth." If we substitute for "God" the word *Sefiroth* (which the Pseudo-Rabad most certainly did not identify with the divine essence), we are left with R. Joseph's doctrine of the transmigration of all things. Cf. Johannes G. Wachter, *Der Spinozismus in Judenthumb oder die von heutigen Judenthumb und dessen geheimen Kabbala Vergötterte Welt* (Amsterdam, 1699), pp. 102–103, 223–243. This author's comments on these "pantheistic" statements are extremely informative.

76. Cf. my *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 244–251, 281–284.

77. I am quoting from the best edition of *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Premysla, 1875), and of *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* (Jerusalem, 1912). *Sefer Gallei Razaya*, only a third of which appears in the Mohilev, 1812 edition, and all of which is extant in MS. Oxford, Neubauer 1820, has not yet been studied properly. See [the passage] on it in *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 61–65.

78. *Exodus Rabbah* 40:3; *Tanhuma*, *Ki Tissa*, §12.

79. Esp. in *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chaps. 1–3, as well as in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 11.

80. Only Luria elevated 'Adam Kadmon above the World of 'Atsiluth; the other sixteenth-century Kabbalists spoke only of the other four "worlds."

81. R. Vital, in *Sha'arei Kedushah*, III, 2, speaks of three "quarries": that of the *Sefiroth*, that of the souls, and that of the angels. *Mahtsevah* means literally "that form

out of which a shape is chiseled"; hence, the Kabbalists often use it to refer to a "sphere of origin."

82. Cf. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, ff. 12b, 13b; for the comparison with a tree, see 32b.

83. Ibid., f. 33a. On *Zihara 'Ila'ah*, see f. 9a–b, and chap. 19 in *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*.

84. "By means of the fault, they are divided into a more particular division, and this is also [how] 613 major roots are divided into 600,000 minor roots: no more than these, but there can be less than this. It also is not necessary that every major root be divided into the same number as the other roots, for everything depends upon the fault. . . . In this way there are sparks of the 613 in each root of the 613 major roots, for each spark of them divides into several sparks. Indeed, there is a major spark that divides into a thousand minor sparks, and there is one that divides into one hundred, etc. But all 613 major sparks taken together do not divide into more than 600,000 minor sparks"—*Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, f. 12b.

85. Thus, for example, there is a division of the "major roots" into seventy "minor roots," which in turn subdivide into 600,000 sparks; for other divisions, cf. *ibid.*, f. 32a.

86. Ibid., f. 5a.

87. Ibid., f. 13b.

88. Ibid., f. 33a.

89. Ibid., f. 8a.

90. Ibid., f. 32b.

91. R. Hayyim Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Mitsvot* (Jerusalem, 1905), f. 15a; cf. Menahem Azariah de Fano, in his edition of R. Moshe Yonah's *Kanfei Yonah*, II, §104, which mentions exceptions. A more moderate version appears in *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 35.

92. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, f. 9b.

93. "Cain is the first-born, for it is known that the first-born is of greater stature than all the other sons. Moreover, we have found that God spoke with him, as it is said, 'and the Lord said unto Cain' [Gen. 4:9]. And it does not use there the name *'Elohim*, as it does in the case of Balaam and Abimelech and Laban, but the name *HVYH*; if so, he must have been a prophet"—*Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 21; cf. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, f. 39a.

94. Even prior to Luria, the anonymous author of *Gallei Razaya* dealt with this problem; the doctrine of the sparks, although not presented as systematically by him as by Luria, occupies a central position there. This may have led to the mistaken assumption that the author was a disciple of Luria's (who was in fact only eighteen years old at the time the book was written).

95. According to Vital, most souls in the last generation before the Redemption come from the roots of Cain and Abel; nearly all of the others have already completed their *tikkun*. According to *Gallei Razaya*, f. 14a, the transmigrations of all souls will have been completed in the year 2000 (5760), and the lower waters will rise and cover the entire world except for the Land of Israel.

96. *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 23, f. 25b.

97. See esp. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 25; On the ascent of souls through all the levels of nature, cf. chap. 22, f. 22b.

98. R. Joseph Solomon Delmedigo (Yashar of Candia), *Noveloth Hokhmah* (Basel, 1631), f. 186a, summarizing Vital's doctrine.

99. *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 5. Cf. chap. 20, where it states: "Know that all the souls in the world that are submerged in the depth of the shells, when they emerge from there to enter into a body, they cannot transmigrate instantly, to enter immediately upon their leaving the *kelippoth*, until they are initially in the aspect of the aura surrounding three successive individuals, who are from the root of their souls. . . . And only after these three *gilgulim* can they transmigrate and come into the world." This view is doubtless connected with the concept of the aura (*avir ha-tselem*) that surrounds a person, which I shall discuss in the following chapter.

100. "Even though when a person transmigrates in the form of a person he does not know of his previous incarnations, nevertheless, when he transmigrates as an animal or a beast or a bird, he knows of his previous incarnation. And he feels pain and regret that he has descended from the heavens, from the form of a human being to the form of an animal"—Elijah ha-Cohen ha-Ittamari of Smyrna, *Shevet Musar*, chap. 14. Nevertheless, various occult practices are mentioned by which a person may learn about his previous *gilgulim*, such as oaths or dream inquiries, as in *'Emek ha-Melekh* (1648), ff. 63a, 94a. Another procedure is described in *Minhath Ya'akov Soleth* (1731), f. 41a–b.

101. First documented in *Sefer ha-Peli'ah* (Korets, 1784), f. 69c.

102. *Tarbits*, 24 (1955), p. 181.

103. Cordovero, *Shi'ur Komah* (1883), f. 56c–d.

104. *Ibid.*, f. 19d. According to Luria, when Adam sinned, his soul became mixed with that of the *Adam Belia'al*, the demonic figure from the Other Side, so that their souls were confused and mixed up. Cf. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 15, f. 16b.

105. M. A. de Fano, *Ma'amar ha-Nefesh* (Pytrikow, 1903), f. 2d, 19a. Opinion is divided among Kabbalists regarding the question as to whether the souls of non-Jews also transmigrate. The author of *Gallei Razaya* affirms this view, while Luria denies it. R. Elijah ha-Cohen, in the very popular work, *Shevet Musar*, chap. 18, again affirms it, as coming from "a true oracle (*maggid*)."

106. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, f. 14a. Cf. what was stated above, at the beginning of this chapter, about the very similar doctrine of the Catharists.

107. *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 5; *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 3, f. 5a.

108. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 5, f. 7b.

109. *Ibid.*, f. 5a.

110. Vital's statements concerning the question of whether the *Yehidah* is capable of sinning are ambiguous. Generally speaking, he attributes sin to the three lowest parts of the soul only; *Hayah* and *Yehidah*, which originate in the highest of the four worlds, *'Atsiluth*, are incapable of sin.

111. *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, end of chap. 2.

112. A controversy regarding this important point took place between Isaiah Tishby and myself. Tishby's position, which is opposed to the above-stated view, appeared in his article "The Messianic Idea and the Messianic Tendencies in the Growth of Hasidism" (Heb.), *Zion*, 32 (1967), pp. 1–45; my view appears in "The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 20 (1970), pp. 25–55, reprinted in my book *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), pp. 176–202.

113. "Devekut, or Communion with God," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 203–226 [originally published in the *Review of Religion*, 14 (1949–1950), pp. 115–139].

114. "Every individual in Israel, according to [the measure of] his deeds and the root of his soul, can raise up from the sparks of the Kings [who fell during the Breaking of the Vessels], whether much or little. This is the reason why all Israel are dependent upon one another, for the holy spark that a person can raise from the *kelippah*, according to the root of his soul, whereby he aids the clarification of that specific spark of holiness, cannot be raised by any other man, even if he is far greater than him in rank and deeds, because his soul will not be from the root of that same spark"—Moses ben Zur, *Me'arath Sedei ha-Makhpelah* (Jerusalem, 1910), f. 52a–b, a synopsis of Lurianic doctrine assembled by a Moroccan Kabbalist, ca. 1700.

115. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* (Korets, 1780), f. 15a, which also says that the enemies of the *Tsaddik* are sparks of his own soul "and he needs to correct them and raise them up through his prayer." This fits in with R. Hayyim Vital's explanation of hatred between brothers or friends whose souls stem from the same root, because both "wish to draw from that root more than their fellow; and they are jealous of one another by nature. Therefore, if they come to apprehend, through the Holy Spirit, that they are both of one root, they will certainly love one another"—*Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 20.

116. *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim* (Korets, 1810), f. 38a.

117. *Likkutei Yekarim* (Lwow, 1792), f. 15a, as well as in the apocryphal *Tsava'ath ha-Rivash*, f. 13a.

118. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, f. 90d; 84c.

119. In his book, *'Olam Barur* (Zolkiew, 1800). I likewise looked in vain in the Bible commentary of the Moroccan Kabbalist Hayyim ben Attar (a work highly esteemed by the Hasidim), *Or ha-Hayyim* (Venice, 1742), for formulations of the doctrine of sparks in this spirit.

120. In his book *Ketoneth Passim* (1866), f. 35b–c.

121. However, such a possibility is mentioned by one of Luria's disciples: cf. Menahem Azariah de Fano, *Tikkunei Teshuvah*, §10.

122. *Amtahath Binyamin* (1796), f. 80b.

123. Vital states only in a very cautious and general manner that all influx (*shefa'*) that pours into the *Tsaddik's* soul sparks, "is also for the sake of all those who are dependent upon him. For this reason their money is precious to them: as it is brought down from above, it is not fitting that he should have contempt for it, for if he did

not need it, the Holy One, blessed be He, would not have given him that thing. Therefore he [i.e., the patriarch Jacob] returned [to gather] 'small tools.'"—*Likkutei Torah* (Vilna, 1880), f. 43a. There is nothing here about the sparks contained in Jacob's property.

124. I have discussed this point in my critique "Martin Buber's Interpretation of Hasidism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, pp. 227–250.

125. *Likkutei Yekarim*, f. 1b, as an utterance of the Baal Shem Tov.

6: TSELEM: THE CONCEPT OF THE ASTRAL BODY

1. *Sefer Rav Pe'alim*, ed. Schönblum (Lemberg, 1885), §21. This collection of Kabbalistic sayings and paradoxes is one of the strangest books in Jewish mystical literature; Schönblum's commentary is completely incorrect in many places. A new edition, based upon manuscripts and with a completely different commentary, is a desideratum.

2. On Abulafia, cf. my *Major Trends*, pp. 119–155.

3. MS. Oxford, Neubauer 1656, where the book appears in its proper, original order, consisting of 656 paragraphs, corresponding to the *gematria* of the book's title—i.e., "A Rose Bouquet (*Shoshan* = 656) of Secrets." The present passage is on f. 232b, §451; in the printed edition (Korets, 1788), f. 69b. I published the corrected text in "Eine kabbalistische Erklärung der Prophetie als Selbstbegegnung," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 74 (1930), p. 287.

4. *Genesis Rabbah* 27:1.

5. §419, according to the proper sequence, contains a brief explanation of this midrash "according to the literal meaning"; this alludes to §451, i.e., our passage.

6. In Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on Daniel 10:21, and in his *Yesod Mora*, chap. 12.

7. This account is discussed in my *Major Trends*, pp. 146ff. The anonymous author describes a light he saw in his room at night: "And I saw that it emanated from myself . . . and I walked about all the house and it went with me; I went into my bed and covered myself, and it went with me." See the text that I published in "Sha'arei Tsedek: A Kabbalistic Treatise of the School of R. Abraham Abulafia, Attributed to R. Shem Tov [ibn Gaon?]" (Heb.), *Kiryath Sefer*, 1 (1924), pp. 127–139, esp. p. 134.

8. *Bath Kol* [the heavenly voice] is a lower level of revelation than that of the Holy Spirit, to which the Talmud frequently refers.

9. This mystical image, taken from Song of Songs 5:3, designates unmediated spiritual vision or perception; it is also used by other Kabbalists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Cf. Moses de Leon, *Mishkan ha-Eduth*, Ms. Berlin 193.1, f. 36b; Menahem Recanati, *Perush ha-Torah* (Venice, 1545), f. 50a. Cf. *Zohar Hadash* (Jerusalem, 1953), ff. 4c and 40d.

10. This is evidently an addition by the learned compiler R. Moses ben Jacob, whose book contains many passages of a magical and theurgical nature, in which

various vocalizations of the ineffable Name of God play a major role (some of these taken from *Sefer Berith Menuḥah*). Given the nature of the author's experience, these visions are more disturbing than they are positive.

11. It is difficult to determine the sources drawn upon by the compiler of *Shushan Sodoth*. In any event, the author of the first excerpt is R. Isaac of Acre, as demonstrated by E. Gottlieb, "Illumination, *Devekuth*, and Prophecy in R. Isaac of Acre's *Sefer Otsar ha-Ḥayyim*" (Heb.), *Proceedings of the Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, II (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 333–334. This author, who wrote in Spain during the first half of the fourteenth century, showed great interest in magical practices, especially in his book *Otsar ha-Ḥayyim* (MS. Günzburg 775, now in Moscow; the first passage appears on f. 103a). The R. Nathan mentioned in our piece (as presenting this new interpretation of prophecy as an encounter with one's own self) may be the same R. Nathan cited by R. Isaac of Acre in his *Me'irath 'Einayim*, MS. München 17, f. 144a. In the course of his discussion there, R. Isaac offers in his name an extremely interesting doctrine from the set of ideas we are discussing here, namely, the ascent and descent of the "divine intellect" in man. As *Shushan Sodoth* describes Nathan as already deceased, this may be taken from a later book by R. Isaac, written after *Me'irath 'Einayim*.

12. The Arabic text of Pseudo-Margriti's *Aim of the Wise* was published in 1933 by Helmut Ritter, in *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, 12. Martin Plessner's richly annotated German translation was published in London in 1962 (*Studies of the Warburg Institute*, 27); the passages quoted below appear there, pp. 198–206. On p. 198 Plessner also lists the literature on this subject.

13. In his *Writings on the Mysteries*, IX, 1–9. In Iamblichus, in any event, the personal daemon is not at all identical with the astral body, referred to in V, 26, in entirely different contexts. The overlapping of the two notions clearly belongs to a later stage of development. Iamblichus is doubtless the source of H. Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim's discussion of the "personal genius" and its function and manifestation: *De occulta philosophia*, [ed. K. A. Nowotny (Graz, Austria, 1967)], III, 21–22. Cf. n. 29.

14. See Corbin's studies in "Le Récit d'Initiation et l'Hermetisme en Iran," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1949, 17 (Zürich, 1950), pp. 158–187, and in his book *Avicenne et le Récit Visionnaire* (Paris, 1954), vol. I, pp. 102–106. It is especially interesting to note that such an acutely intelligent man as Abul Barakat of Baghdad, lauded as the "wonder of his age," included the doctrine of the perfected nature in his system.

15. H. Ritter, "Picatrix, ein arabisches Handbuch hellenistischer Magie," in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* 1921–22 (Leipzig, 1923), p. 124.

16. A. Dietrich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (Leipzig, 1923), p. 4; R. Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig, 1927), p. 178; Reitzenstein-Schader, *Studien zum antiken Synkretismus aus Iran und Griechenland* (Leipzig, 1926), pp. 76, 112–114.

17. The genesis of the image of the *soma astrooides* or *augooides*, the "astral body," is examined in detail by G. R. S. Mead in his studies of the "subtle body": "The Spirit Body: An Excursion into Alexandrian Psycho-Physiology," *The Quest* (1910), pp. 472–488; *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition* (London, 1919). The sources

cited here were unknown to him. Cf. E. R. Dodds, his appendix "The Astral Body in Neoplatonism" in his edition of Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 313–321. Regarding the revival and development of this notion in Renaissance Platonism, cf. D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958), pp. 38–40; Walter Pagel, in *Ambix*, 8 (1960), pp. 127–128, and esp. p. 133, about Paracelsus.

18. K. Preisendanz, *Papyri graecae magicae* (Leipzig, 1931), II, p. 15, which contains the formula for "self-contemplation," and p. 23, which contains the evocation of the personal daemon.

19. See Shem Tov ibn Falaquera, *Sefer ha-Ma'aloṭh* (Berlin, 1894), p. 22. R. Moses de Leon likewise brings this passage in his *Sefer Mishkan 'Eduth*.

20. R. Moses Isserles, *Torath ha-'Olah* (Prague, 1569), §14, f. 19b–d. There were many who took exception to this bold conception of the nature of prophetic vision (e.g., Joseph Solomon Delmedigo's *Noveloth Hokhmah*, which argues that Isserles "greatly reduced the prophetic visions, dressing them in unclean garments and extinguishing their light"). There is no way to determine whether Isserles, who lived in Cracow, knew *Shoshan Sodoth*, which was composed sixty years earlier in the Ukraine, and whether this work inspired his reinterpretation; in any event, he does not cite it in this chapter, in which he does quote other Kabbalists. The passage from R. Judah Hayyat's *Sefer Minhath Yehudah* quoted here appears in *Sefer Ma'arekheth ha-Elohuth* (Mantua, 1558), f. 143a.

21. A text from a circle of Ashkenazic Hasidim written in the first half of the thirteenth century, *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, contains the following interpretation of Job 4:16: " 'A form was before mine eyes'—he spoke of a form that one is shown within some things . . . as when a person sees in the water the form of the moon, or his own form . . . [so] he sees his own form as in God's light and glory"—MS. München, Hebr. 207, f. 5a. According to this, Eliphaz the Temanite saw himself in the vision described here.

22. I have published the manuscript of R. Isaac ha-Cohen's discussions in *Madda'ei ha-Yahaduth* (Jerusalem, 1927), II, p. 254. The text is very corrupt, but can largely be corrected on the basis of the anonymous quotation in R. Meir ibn Gabbai, *'Avodath ha-Kodesh* [Venice, 1567] IV, chap. 27, on which my translation is based.

23. R. Eleazar of Worms, *Hokhmah ha-Nefesh* (Lemberg, 1876), ff. 17d–18a. Regarding the overall conception, cf. *Major Trends*, pp. 117–118, as well as my book *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Berlin, 1962), p. 100; Eng.: *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 112ff.

24. A special problem is raised by the pseudepigraphic text known in the German editions as *Des Juden Abraham von Worms der wahren Praktik in der uralten göttlichen Magie und in erstaunlichen Dingen, Wie sie durch die heilige Kabbala und durch Elohyim mitgetheilt worden* (allegedly Cologne, 1725); the English edition, translated and edited by S. L. MacGregor Mathers from the French manuscripts, is entitled *The Book of the Secret Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage, as delivered by Abraham the Jew unto His Son Lamech* (London, 1898). The evocation of one's guardian angel and related preparatory rituals occupy a

central place in this book. It would require a more detailed investigation to determine whether this book was indeed written by a Jewish occultist of the Renaissance period, as it claims (and as is supported by the author's excellent knowledge of Hebrew), or by a non-Jewish German author who tried to project himself into the Jewish mentality. The latter view is supported, not only by the extensive use of Christian symbols, which he might not have known to be Christian, or (which might be interpolations), but especially by the joining of the concepts of Kabbalah and magic as a pair to designate divine knowledge. This combination suggests an author writing under the influence of the Christian Kabbalah of Pico della Mirandola, who introduced this conceptual pair into Renaissance thought. In my article "Alchemie und Kabbala," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 69 (1925), p. 95, I supported the view that the author was Jewish, as I had not yet realized the influence of Pico. In any event, the entire work, which is extremely interesting, requires a special examination (I might add, of course, that no Jew ever called his son Lamech).

25. *Kitāb ma'āni al-naḥs*: *Buch vom Wesen der Seele*, ed. I. Goldziher (Berlin, 1907), pp. 19–20; in Isaac Broyde's Hebrew translation, *Toroth ha-Nefesh* (Paris, 1896), p. 25. This passage was first noted in connection with the *Zohar*'s conception of *tselem* by I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1961), II, p. 92.

26. The Ethiopian Book of Enoch, chap. 62, mentions these "garments of life," which the souls receive from the Lord of the Spirits. From here the image passed on to the New Testament and to early Christian literature, as well as to Mandaean literature; it also appears in the Hebrew tradition in *Sefer Hekhaloth*, where it is designated by the same term. Cf. H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch*, chap. 18, and the editor's notes to the English translation, p. 62. Cf. also Louis Canet's appendix on the garments of the soul, "Vêtements des Ames," in Franz Cumont, *Lux Perpetua* (Paris, 1949), pp. 429–431. To this, one should add the image of Adam's "garments of light" (*kotnot or*), replaced after the sin by "garments of skin" (*kotnot 'or*), as stated already before Origen in a second-century aggadic tradition; cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 20:29, ed. Theodor, p. 196.

27. The author of the *Zohar* alludes here to *Midrash Yetsirath ha-Velad* (in *Tanḥuma, Pekudai*), which is the source for most of these motifs, with the exception of the *tselem* notion. Cf. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, I (Jerusalem, 1938), pp. 152–155.

28. *Zohar*, III, 43a–b; English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, II, pp. 787–789.

29. *Zohar*, I, 224a–b. In R. Hayyim Vital's commentary *ad loc.*, this garment is identified as *tselem*.

30. On the concept of the *Daena* as man's higher self, see M. Mole, "Le Pont Cinvat et l'Initiation dans le Mazdeisme," *Révue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 157 (1960), pp. 155–185; August von Gall, *Basileia tou theou* (Heidelberg, 1926), pp. 99–102, 111–115. On the connection between this notion and the Gnostic hymn of the soul in the *Acts of Thomas*, see G. Widengren, *The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God* (Uppsala, 1945), pp. 85–86. On Mandaean and Manichean parallels, see Alfred Adam, *Die Psalmen des Thomas und das Perlenlied* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 69–70, and esp. the important analysis

of these concepts and terms in H. C. Peuch, *Annuaire du College de France*, 63 (1963), pp. 199–213.

31. In the *Sahih*, al-Buchari's collection of traditions of the prophet Muhammed (*hadit*), bk. I, chap. 15.

32. I discuss the term *Haluka de-Rabbanan* in some detail in my analysis of *Zohar*, I, 66a, "The Paradisic Garb of Souls and the Origin of the Concept of *Haluka de-Rabbanan*" (Heb.), in *Tarbits*, 24 (1955), pp. 297–306. At the time, I was unable to demonstrate the link between R. Jacob ben Nissim's concept of "garments of the souls" and that of the *Daena*. Meanwhile, D. Z. Baneth, *Haluqa de-Rabbanan, Hibbur Yafeh min ha-Yeshu'ah* and a Mohammedan Tradition" (Heb.), *Tarbits*, 25 (1956), pp. 331–336, has unequivocally proven the terminological dependence of the image of *Haluk* in Jacob ben Nissim on Arabic eschatology, as documented in al-Buchari. While Baneth does not claim that the Islamic translation is already a vulgarization of the *Daena* notion, given the context, this strikes me as obvious. Thus, the line of development may be followed from the Persian idea through the intermediate Islamic link to the *Zohar*, written in Spain. However, I have also found an important Jewish link in an apocalyptic text belonging to the *Merkavah* literature: R. Ishamel sees "hosts of ministering angels sitting and weaving garments of salvation and making crowns of life and adorning them with jewels and pearls." Cf. MS. New York of *Hekhaloth Rabbati* and Jellinek's *Beth ha-Midrash*, V, p. 168. We thus learn here that the "garments of life" of the Book of Enoch are woven by the angels. Since we already know from the Talmud about crowns woven from the prayers of Israel, we may infer that these garments are likewise woven from the good deeds of Israel. Hence, it seems quite likely that the Jewish angelology found in the *Hekhaloth* literature is in turn an intermediate stage between the Persian and Islamic eschatology. Yet despite this Jewish source, one cannot deny the importance of the Islamic work *Hibbur Yafeh me-ha-Yeshu'ah*, as may be unequivocally shown by the details and the terminology of *haluk* [garment] used by the Hebrew translator. R. Jacob ben Nissim's book is available in the Arabic original in J. Obermann, *Ibn Shahin's Book of Comfort, known as the Hibbur Yafeh min ha-Yeshu'ah*, ed. H. Z. Hirschberg (Jerusalem, 1954), chap. 11, pp. 26–29.

33. See Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, XXXI, 4, f. 205b. Cordovero renders *tselem* as "shadow," because "it forms a shadow over man's head." In his view the *tselem* is an "ethereal body, in which are imprinted the forms of these soul parts in human form." There seems a certain contradiction between the two works, which were separated by a certain span of time. Here, each of the three soul parts—*nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah*—have their own specific *tselem*; the primary *tselem* is that of the *neshamah*, while the other two are "shadows." For Cordovero's understanding of *tselem* as a purely biological principle, see *Shi'ur Komah* (Warsaw, 1883), p. 119. A more detailed discussion appears in R. Abraham Azulai's *Hesed le-Avraham*, written in Hebron ca. 1620–1630, pt. II, chap. 52. All three parts of the soul possess a garment called *tselem*, by means of which a person's spirit and soul are protected from the demons and harmful spirits that fill the entire world. Such a *tselem* is owned alike by Jews and non-Jews,

and even by the spirits, but animals do not have one. When Adam sinned, this *uselem* left him, “and took hold among the external ones [according to] the measure of their sin, whether great or small, and when he continued to sin, it left him completely, and this is what is said: ‘and they knew that they were naked’ [Gen. 3:7.]”

34. Vital, *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, in the full edition (Przemysl, 1875), chap. 64, f. 85c. In the introduction to his frequently reprinted moral tract, *Sha'arei Kedushah*, Vital speaks of the revelation of the souls of the righteous, and adds: “There are people whose own souls, when they have become utterly purified, appear to them and guide them in all their ways.” This evidently refers to the visible manifestation of the *uselem* before the person's eyes. However, Vital does not indicate whether such an experience is higher or lower than that of the revelation of the souls of the righteous or of the prophet Elijah, discussed in the same context. With regard to “purified vision,” cf. Plessner's above-mentioned translation of *Picatrix*, p. 203, and what is stated there about the perception of “perfect nature” with “spiritual eyes.”

35. Vital, *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, chap. 69, f. 93b.

36. Several of those who have commented on this *Zohar* passage have connected the two shadows with *Yevamoth* 122a, according to which daemons have a reflection, but not a reflection of a reflection—that is, the shadow of a daemon has no additional shadow. Man, by contrast, does have a second-degree reflection, so that one may speak of two shadows.

37. In other words, these two spirits have nothing in common with the particular human being. They are, for example, freewheeling, “naked spirits,” seeking a body in which to find lodging; or they are demons sent expressly for this purpose. R. Hayyim Vital interpreted this passage in the former sense in *Or ha-Hamah* (Przemysl, 1897), sec. III, f. 33a.

38. *Zohar*, II, 43a; Tishby, pp. 104–105; English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, II, pp. 788.

39. *Zohar*, I, 191a; Tishby, II, pp. 103–104; English: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, II, pp. 785–787.

40. R. Shemtov, *Sefer ha-Emunoth* (Ferrara, 1556), f. 62a. The printed version is corrupt in several places. Elsewhere there, f. 77a, *uselem* is referred to as the “concealed body” (*guf ha-ne'elam*), as the astral body is designated by the author of the Arabic text of Pseudo-Bayya's *Kitāb ma'āni al-naḥs*.

41. *Sidrei de-Shimmusha Rabba*; see the early thirteenth-century text that I published in *Tarbitz*, 16 (1945), p. 202. The term is exactly appropriate to the Greek term αὐγοειδές σῶμα in Origen.

42. R. Bahya ben Asher, *Perush ha-Torah*, on Genesis 49:33. Likewise in his *Kad ha-Kemah*, under the heading *Kin'ah*, ed. Breit (Lemberg, 1892), II, f. 59a, Bahya speaks of “the second garment, which is known to the cognoscenti, with which the soul clothes itself as with bodily form; an exceedingly fine form, which has reality. And this is the secret of the matter regarding our holy rabbi [i.e., Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi], who came to his home every Sabbath evening and recited Kiddush [i.e., after his death; see *Ketuvot* 103a], and this is not the place to discuss it in greater detail.”

43. In my article on the garments of souls, *Tarbits*, 24, pp. 293–294, I cited the relevant passages in Shemtov ibn Gaon's and Meir ben Solomon abi Sahula's explanations of the passage in Nahmanides.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

45. "As I heard from my mentor [i.e., Luria]: aside from there being a special garment for *nefesh*, and for *ruah*, and for *neshamah*, there is another garment encompassing them all"—Vital, *Sefer Gilgulim*, chap. 69, f. 93b. Details concerning this doctrine of the *tselem* and the organs of the ethereal body appear in Vital's *'Ets Hayyim*, chap. 26 (*Sha'ar ha-Tselem*), and in *Sha'ar ha-Kavvanoth*, *Derushei Sukkoth*, §6, 7 (Jerusalem, 1873), ff. 106–107, and in *Sefer ha-Likkutim* (Jerusalem, 1913), f. 70a, in a highly occult-naturalistic mode. These passages also develop the teaching of the "sparks of the [primary] *tselem*" that vitalize the other garments or shadows. During the soul's various transmigrations, a person perfects the parts of this *tselem*, which accompany the various parts of the soul in their transmigrations. This idea goes way beyond the doctrine in the *Zohar*, which knows nothing of a transmigration of the *tselem*. Whereas the concept of the *tselem* found in *Sha'ar ha-Tselem* originates in Cordoverian teaching, the previous section (*Derushei ha-Tselem*), which deals with the problem of the *tselem* in the configurations of emanation, is based entirely upon the new approaches of Luria.

46. R. Menahem Azariah Fano's major work on the soul, *Ma'amar ha-Nefesh* (Pietrokov, 1903), contains a detailed presentation (pp. 3–10) of the doctrine of the *tselem* as the astral body, based upon the writings of Vital, who is not mentioned by name, and the *Zohar*. The *tselem* is called here "the seal of the soul." A short discussion appears as well in de Fano's *'Asarah Ma'amaroth* (Venice, 1597), *Ma'amar Hikkur Din*, pt. IV, chap. 14, f. 40a. Elsewhere, parallel to the doctrine of the *tselem* (but without mentioning it), de Fano speaks of an occult ether or air, in which all human acts are recorded and preserved until the Day of Judgment: "Know that the universal book, in which all human actions are recorded as soon as they are performed, is the sapphire-colored ether surrounding [a man]. In it all the individual movements of a man are engraved, even the glances of his eyes or if he opens his mouth for good or for evil, and certainly that of his other organs: if he lifts his hands he is called an evildoer. Indeed, even the thoughts stirring his heart, which inevitably bring forth joy or sadness on his face [and thus leave an impress on the ether]; likewise, that God sees into the heart. Instantly, there is a selection before Him of the good works, to inscribe them in the ether of Paradise, which embodies itself in the ether of this world [in order to store the good deeds until the Day of Judgment], and the same is true of the evil deeds in the ether of Gehenna"—*Ibid.*, pt. II, chap. 12, f. 16b. *Ma'amar ha-Nefesh* explicitly states (pp. 23–24) that man's deeds are initially inscribed upon "the aura surrounding him. . . . For the ether surrounding him is his place, and it is the book upon which all his deeds are inscribed in fact, and are surveyed by the Righteous Judge in one glance." In Judah Loew ben Simon's commentary to *'Asarah Ma'amaroth*, which appears in the Frankfurt edition of 1698 (*Imroth Tehoroth*, f. 49d), we read that the "sapphire ether" is that "which surrounds the person, and this is its name among the physicians—the sur-

rounding ether (*avir ha-makif*).” This refers, as Prof. Walter Pagel kindly informed me, to the contemporary doctrine of *ambiens nos aer*, “the ether surrounding us,” which corresponds to the Greek term τὸ περιέχον ἡμᾶς, used by Galen. The term is also used in Paracelsus’s work on nymphs, sylphs, and pygmies (*Writings*, ed. Sudhoff, vol. XIV, p. 125). The allusion to this medical usage is easily confirmed by the fact that the author of this commentary was himself a physician in the Frankfurt community; cf. M. Horwitz, *Frankfurter Rabbinen* (1883), vol. 2, p. 83. Hence, the surrounding ether is not a uniform cosmic ether, as in Indian notions, but an aura surrounding the individual *iselem* at certain times. On the other hand, the “Book of Records” mentioned in the Talmud, which is opened before God on Rosh Hashanah, becomes in de Fano the equivalent of an “Akasha Chronicle,” which the theosophists speak of at length. Cf. F. J. Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition*, vol. III (Münster, 1839), pp. 461, 705, which also refers to that passage in de Fano.

The notion of the sapphire ether in which the soul wraps itself is also mentioned in de Fano’s generation in *Sefer Gai Hizayon* of R. Abraham Yagel, in Italy, compared ca. 1580 (Alexandria, 1880), p. 3a (§9): “And one might ask, What is the garment given to the soul until it returns each morning to this body? And he answered and said: A garment of pure sapphire ether. But how does this ether become transformed from matter to a garment of the soul while it is still alive? In your life you cannot understand the truth of the matter.” The concept of the “sapphire body” as the garment of man in Paradise was borrowed from de Fano by Naftali Bacharach, *Sefer ‘Emek ha-Melekh* (Amsterdam, 1648), f. 41c.

47. Cf. Pinhas Selig Gliksman, *Berihei Zahav* (Pyetrikow, 1909), pp. 65–66.

48. In the collection of sayings of Jacob Frank, *Sefer Divrei ha-Adon*, extant in Polish in the University of Cracow Library, MS. nos. 305, 326.

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GERSHOM SCHOLEM was a professor of Jewish mysticism at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem until his death in 1982. Among his most important works are *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, and *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*.

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